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August 20, 2014

THE Christian CENTURY

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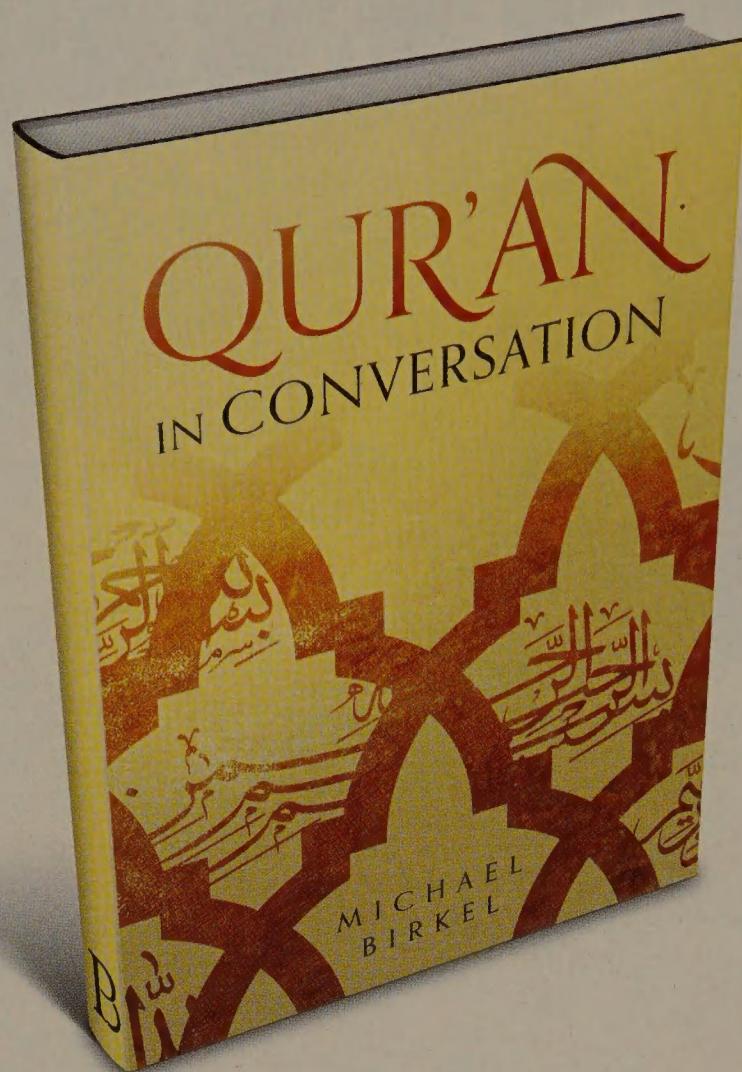
John Howard Yoder

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Editor's DESK

by John M. Buchanan

Moderate wisdom

IN WORSHIP we had just heard the story of Jacob's famous dream about the ladder extending from earth to heaven. The minister prayed: "O God, who gives us dreams and visions, we hear the news of the world, and it feels like we are in the midst of a dream bordering upon nightmare." She proceeded to hold up the litany of tragedy that was on our hearts that morning: the attack on a Malaysian airliner causing 298 fatalities; violence between Israel and Hamas with hundreds of innocent Palestinian deaths; unaccompanied children from Central America crossing our border to escape danger and being met with red-faced anger and resentment; resurgent Islamic extremism in Iraq.

It's a nightmarish moment, and it seems to me that intolerant extremism has never been so ascendant. Extremists seem to be in charge everywhere.

In this issue, Philip Jenkins (p. 10) describes the sad consequences of ongoing Iraqi disintegration and the emergence of a very violent Islamism. The northern Iraqi city of Mosul, which incorporates ancient Nineveh, is part of the huge geographic area recently taken over by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, a militant extremist group which aspires to bring much of the Muslim world under its absolute control. ISIS has declared the entire area a new caliphate and has claimed authority over all Muslims.

Of course, religious and political extremism is not new. Back in the 1960s, Harry and Bonaro Overstreet wrote *The Strange Tactics of Extremism*. A generation ago, H. Richard Niebuhr wrote: "The great source of evil in this life is the absolutizing of the relative." That's exactly what's happening when ISIS militants threaten to kill Christians, Israeli extremists call for "Death to Arabs," and Hamas extremists celebrate the kidnapping and murder of Jewish young men.

The world desperately needs an energetic renewal of intelligent moderation in politics and in religion. Our own nation could use some as well. The shameful immigration crisis at our border continues because extremists in the Republican Party regard working with Democrats as rank heresy.

I'm praying for a renaissance of moderation. If we need a model of what moderation looks like, we could turn to Acts 15 and read about a compromise in a serious conflict between the first Christians.

Each side in that conflict was sure of the truth and rightness of its position. Each side was persuaded by Peter and James to compromise. Each gave a little and got a little. Some say it was on that day, a day of thoughtful listening and compromise, that the early Christian enterprise was transformed from a local sect into a world religion.



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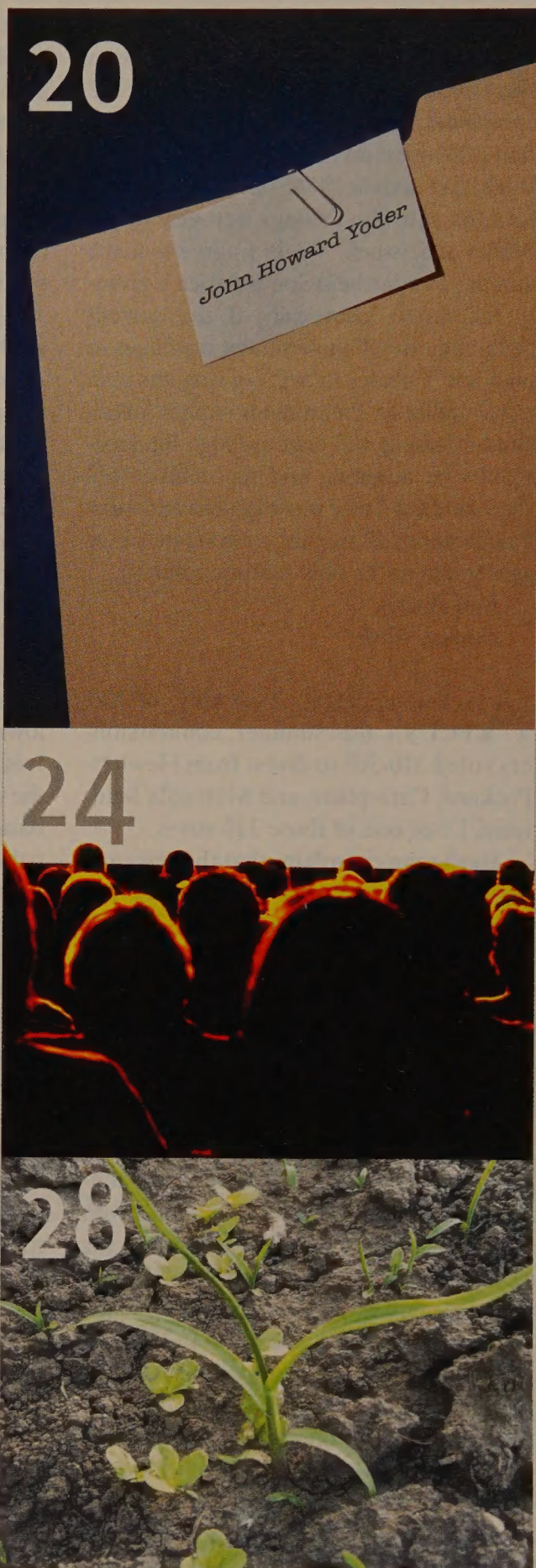
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The CHRISTIAN CENTURY, (ISSN 0009-5281) is published biweekly at 104 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1100, Chicago IL 60603. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Product (Canadian Distribution) Sales Agreement No. 1406523. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHRISTIAN CENTURY, P.O. Box 429, Congers NY 10920-0429.



Debating divestment

In critiquing the decision by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to divest from three companies involved in the Israeli occupation ("Divisive divestment," July 23), John Buchanan writes, "I've never been comfortable with the analogy between South Africa and Israel." While I agree that the analogy to apartheid South Africa is grossly inaccurate historically, if the current right-wing Israeli government continues to push for "Greater Israel"—giving less than equal rights to Palestinians—many mainstream Israelis will acknowledge the analogy to be accurate, and the conflict will rage on. That's why most Israelis and most Palestinians still support a two-state peace agreement as the only realistic solution.

Ron Young
Everett, Wash.

At the General Assembly of the PCUSA this summer, commissioners voted 310-303 to divest from Hewlett-Packard, Caterpillar, and Motorola Solutions. I cast one of those 310 votes.

Buchanan complains that the resource people and committee chairs were not neutral and that observers in T-shirts unduly influenced commissioners. Give commissioners some credit. I was there, and I voted my conscience. The only issue is the occupation.

Prior to the General Assembly, I aired four conversations on my radio program, *Religion for Life*, providing equal time for opposing views. A study group at my congregation also spent eight sessions with *Zionism Unsettled*, a study most agreed was "eye-opening." My one speech on the floor of the plenary was about *Zionism Unsettled* and the important work of the Israel-Palestine Mission Network of the PCUSA. I asked the General Assembly to stop demonizing this group and this document.

Prior to the General Assembly I did my homework. While at the General Assembly I paid attention, heard the arguments, and voted my conscience. My vote had nothing to do with Jewish-Presbyterian

relations. It had nothing to do with employees of these corporations. It had nothing to do with "who owns the land according to the Bible."

My vote had everything to do with the highly militarized nation-state of Israel's illegal and, in my view, immoral occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. I voted not to profit from it. The occupation needs to end. The powerful parties (Israel and its ally the United States) need to end it. If Israel continues its human rights abuses and collective punishment of Palestinians, and if U.S. politicians continue to wring their hands, then the world will make noise and will act.

John Shuck
Johnson City, Tenn.

Buchanan clearly conveyed sadness at the discord and alienation felt by the various parties, especially between the two sides of the issue within the PCUSA following the vote at the General Assembly. It is, indeed, difficult to come to terms with the small number of votes that tipped the balance for divestment. I felt sad and pained, too, by the time I finished reading.

And yet I feel even more troubled and deeply pained by the disturbing situation that has been continuing in Israel/Palestine for more than six and a half decades and seems to be only getting worse. To me it is unacceptable that we—Americans, Presbyterians—go blithely on year after year condoning what the Israelis are doing to people who live in their midst and on land that does not belong to Israel. As I write, I note that most Americans unblinkingly believe that Israel has the right to kill hundreds, even thousands, of people with impunity.

I am a Presbyterian born, bred, and educated through seminary who does not accept this situation and believes that Presbyterians should be at the forefront of ending violence and making peace, in the vanguard of those calling on Congress and the president to stop accepting Israel's theft of land. I do not condone Palestinian reactions, but I understand them. What I

don't understand is how we can say, as the president does again and again, that Israel has the right to defend itself, while not saying anything about Palestinian rights.

Connie Eckhoff Charles
El Cajon, Calif.

Church in Africa . . .

I'm grateful to Jason Byassee for his appreciative and insightful reflections on my *African Christianity Rising* documentary film series ("When the Westerners leave," July 23). However, there are several corrections I'd like to offer. First, he quotes a "Catholic bishop" as saying Ghanaian Christians have thrown away the "envelope" (that is, culture) in which Europeans brought the gospel to them. Archbishop Peter Sarpong is more gracious and apposite in what he actually says. After saying good-heartedly that "they could not have brought anything else; they brought what they *knew*," he observes simply that "a time came when we had to dismantle, gradually, the envelope—the garment—and put on, if you like, our own garment" (which is what he did as a pioneer in introducing African culture into worship).

Second, the young couple leading the small start-up Pentecostal church we portray in Ghana do not say that their visitation work fails every week to get good turnouts for Sunday worship. They say simply that their efforts produce mixed results. And sometimes, Pastor Fred notices, they get a good crowd even when he doesn't do visitation, leading him to say: "God, you're doing your own work!"

Finally, our filming in Ghana and Zimbabwe spanned a period of 13 years (not "almost 20"), with follow-up filming on characters and communities in both countries. For readers wanting to learn more about this series, they can visit www.jamesault.com.

James Ault
Northampton, Mass.

August 20, 2014

The Yoder file

It is not often that the CENTURY publishes a feature article about the sexual behavior of a theologian, but the case of John Howard Yoder (see p. 20) raises questions for all Christians, not just for the Mennonite community to which he belonged. What is the relationship between what a theologian writes and how he lives his life? Does the life make a difference in how we read the theology?

Yoder's behavior is particularly challenging for Mennonites to deal with, not only because he was a prominent Mennonite leader but because Mennonite theology has traditionally focused on ethics more than doctrine, on the life lived more than the beliefs espoused. When teachers of the Word don't practice what they preach, their teachings are looked at with suspicion. How could the most articulate spokesperson for Christian nonviolence in the 20th century engage in sexual behavior that was abusive and coercive and itself a form of violence?

Part of the Yoder story is about how the people to whom he was accountable and who struggled to discipline him did not respond adequately to the experiences of the women who suffered. Many people were left in the dark about the disciplinary process and about the facts of the case, and the women and their stories were marginalized. That helps explain why this part of Yoder's life has continued to be discussed and why the issues continue to resurface. The pain of the victims does not go away.

If the sexual abuse scandals in the Catholic Church have taught us anything, it is that abusers must be removed from positions that allow them to continue their behavior and that efforts to deal with abuse must be handled with transparency.

A new level of openness has been adopted by the seminary that formerly employed Yoder and by the Mennonite Church USA. Last year a committee was formed to deal with the unfinished agenda, and it is working with a historian to craft and publish an account of Yoder's behavior and the church's response to it. It is also seeking means of healing for the women involved. A public ceremony of lament and healing has been proposed for the next year's MCUSA convention. A document on how to handle and prevent sexual abuse by church leaders is also in the works. The Mennonite experience may well provide a model for other denominations and institutions dealing with similar issues.

People could never quite look at Paul Tillich or Martin Luther King the same way once revelations about their sexual misconduct became known. Yet people still read these theologians with profit. As Martin Luther commented, God can use a crooked stick to draw a straight line. Yoder's theology still demands to be read—both in light of his own life and in the light of the gospel he sought to expound.

Part of the Yoder story is about the church's failure to respond.

CENTURY marks

RIGHT MOVE: Billionaire Ted Stanley is donating \$650 million to the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard for researching and treating the genetic roots of mental illness. His son Jonathan was diagnosed as a young adult with bipolar disorder with psychosis. Although Jonathan's illness is very treatable, Ted has met the parents of many other children with mental illness for whom no treatment works. Jonathan says he's fine with the fact that his father is giving away most of what could be his inheritance. "All I can say is my family got it right" (NPR.org, July 22).

LEARNING TO CARE: A study conducted by Harvard psychologist Richard Weissbourd found that 80 percent of youths said their parents were more concerned about their achievements

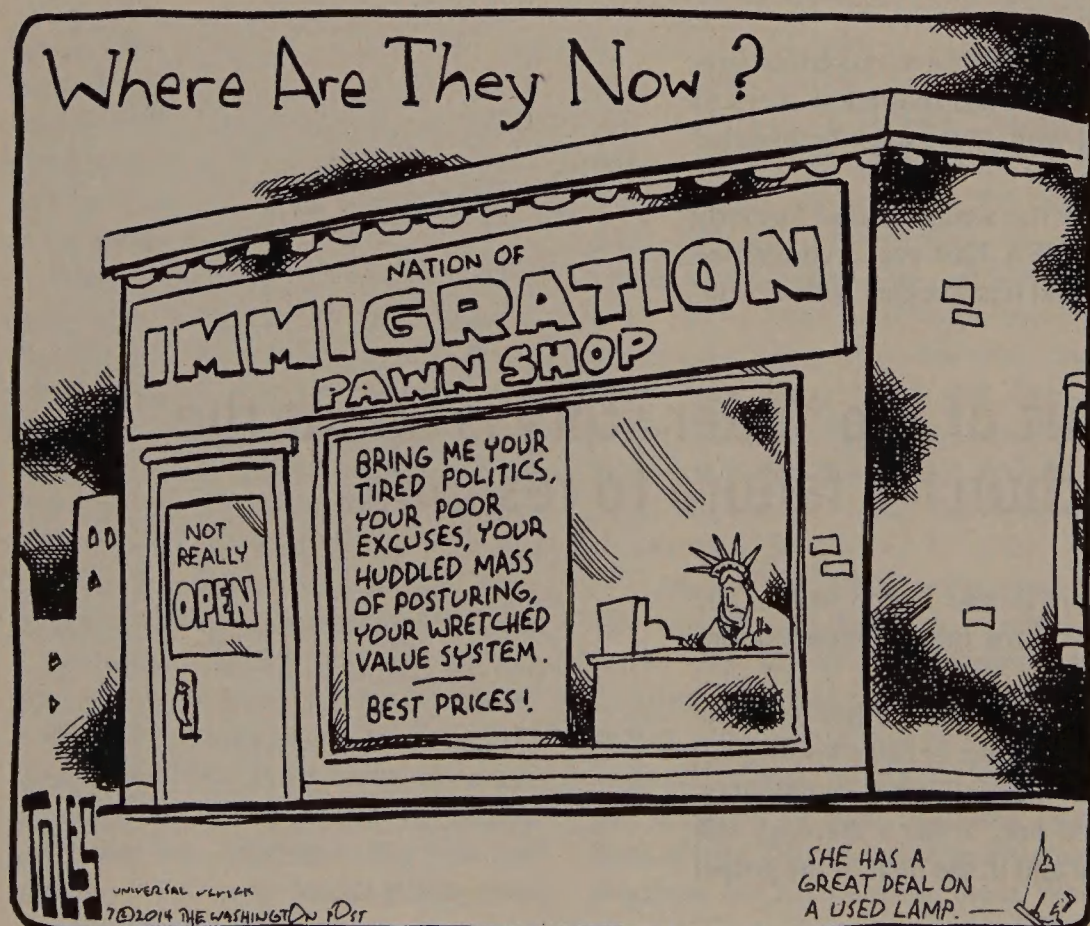
than whether they care for others. Weissbourd says children can and must be taught to be caring. He's developed a five-point process for parents to teach and model caring for their children. Learning to care for others is like learning a sport: repetition helps. He recommends a daily ritual at bedtime, dinner, or while driving that expresses thanks for people who contribute positively in our lives. It's also important to find ways of widening the circle of care to include people of other cultures and communities (*Washington Post*, July 18).

THE PRUDENT LIFE: The quest for fame, fortune, and sexual variety is like getting hooked on drugs: once you have a little of it, you want more, and getting more leads to less happiness. Numerous academic studies are underscoring what

religions have touted for millennia: it is better to give than to receive, and satisfaction doesn't come from extrinsic benefits like material wealth but from intrinsic ones, such as better relationships with others. "Declaring war on these destructive impulses is not about asceticism or Puritanism," says Arthur C. Brooks. "It is about being a prudent person who seeks to avoid unnecessary suffering" (*New York Times*, July 18).

MISTAKEN IDENTITY: Christian tradition has long painted a negative portrait of Ishmael, the son born to Abraham and Hagar when Abraham's wife Sarah could not conceive. Ishmael is seen as a wild man whose descendants would live at odds with the children of Abraham. But those views are prejudices based on dubious exegesis, according to Christopher Heard. It is especially problematic when Ishmael's descendants are identified with Arabs or Muslims and used as an explanation for tension in the Middle East. There is little historical proof that Arabs descend from Ishmael. Besides, Ishmael was also blessed by God with the promise of a great nation (Gen. 21:1), just as Abraham's other descendants were (*Interpretation*, July).

SOURCE CRITICISM: Some of the most controversial and heavily edited articles on Wikipedia involve religious topics. Former president George W. Bush tops the list of the 100 most-altered articles on the open-source encyclopedia, but not far behind are the articles on Jesus (5) and the Catholic Church (7), with the Prophet Muhammad (35) and Pope John Paul II (82) farther down the list. The list also includes specific religions: Jehovah's Witnesses, Islam, Christianity, and



Leaving Nineveh

by Philip Jenkins

THE ANCIENT Christian history of the Middle East has become agonizingly relevant. Cities central in that history appear in headlines in the context of fanaticism and mass destruction. The State Department's maps of the latest atrocities coincide with the most venerable landscapes of Eastern Christianity.

The city of Damascus in Syria needs no explanation in terms of its role in the Christian story, and late Roman Gaza likewise produced some pivotal thinkers and theologians. Both cities are also featured in the Old Testament.

But what about Syria's Hama, the scene of some of the bloodiest fighting in that country's civil war? The Byzantines knew it as Epiphania, home of the historian John, who is a prime source for the Roman-Persian wars of the sixth century. Hama's Great Mosque stands within the readily identifiable remains of the Byzantine basilica church.

The first Syrian provincial capital to fall under rebel control in the current

conflict was Ar-Raqqah, which historians of Christian monasticism know as Kallinikos, a haven of learning and piety from the sixth century. Latakia was once Laodicea, where the bishop was the often vilified heretic Apollinarius. Homs, another frequent Syrian battlefield, was fifth-century Emesa, where a beloved shrine claimed the head of St. John the Baptist.

Syria can scarcely compete historically, however, with neighboring Mesopotamia, the land we presently call Iraq (future maps might bear different names). Over the past summer, the city of Mosul has been the center of global attention, following its capture by the forces of the extremist Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham. ISIS then went on to proclaim a revived caliphate, an office dormant since 1924, and promised to lead its followers against Christendom, even to the gates of Rome. It also launched a brutal reign of terror against both Shi'a Muslims and fellow Sunnis.

Before the new self-appointed caliph, Ibrahim, first addressed the Islamic world, his minions had murdered the city's leading Sunni clerics. Although the so-called Islamic state may have stirred up too many enemies to prove an enduring presence, it naturally terrifies surviving members of other religions, especially Christians.

That story has been prominently reported, but few reports have paid much attention to the identity of those Christians and their spiritual culture which now seems on the verge of extinction. For Westerners, those local Christians face an easy choice: Why don't they just leave? If they do, though, they will be abandoning a Mosul that in its day occupied a central place in Christian thought and development. Would Christians happily forsake Assisi or Santiago de Compostela, Canterbury or Cologne, if threatened with a similar situation? Would they not be held back by centuries of Christ-haunted memory and tradition? The story of Mosul is at least equal to that of any of these later upstarts.

Losing sight

Crossing the lake in thick fog with nothing to be seen except the buoy to starboard marking the rock we didn't want to hit that Tom said we'd already passed but Whit said *No, we're way beyond it* which is when the boat rose up bow riding high to leave us stranded the boat an ark the rock a mountain the fog a cloud that covered us waiting for who knew what—a voice, a face, a sudden shining—but there was nothing more than thinking how many times when losing sight we circle back to where we started only to begin again.

Sarah Rossiter

Mosul was originally a center of the fearsome Assyrians, and that connection attracted the attention of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. All three faiths esteem the prophet Jonah, whom God sent to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. Ancient Nineveh itself was once separate from Mosul but has now been absorbed into the metropolitan area that the region's Christians call Nineveh rather than Mosul. Under its Arabic name of Nebi Yunus (Prophet Jonah), the prophet's grave was a pilgrimage destination for millennia—although reports suggest that ISIS thugs are in the process of demolishing the shrine.

Mosul was an early center of Jewish life and learning, where a Christian church emerged no later than the second century. It became a key center for the Church of the East, the so-called Nestorian Church, which made it a metropolitan see. Also present were the so-called Monophysites, today's Syrian Orthodox Church. These churches used Syriac, a language close to that of the apostles, and the Mosul area still has some Syriac-speaking villages.

Mosul was at the heart of a network of very early monasteries. Within 30 miles of

(Gregory himself was buried at Mar Mattai.)

Hard times arrived in the later 13th century with the coming of the Mongols. Facing growing intolerance in their old seat of Baghdad, the patriarchs of the Church of the East based themselves at the house of Rabban Hormizd. Christian life persisted there and in the surrounding religious houses. We get a sense of this from priceless Syriac Christian scriptures like the *Cave of Treasures*, which is preserved in the British Museum. It was copied in 1709 by the learned priest

the beginning of the 20th century. Kurdish raids and bandit attacks repeatedly hit the monasteries and devastated their libraries. During World War I, the Ottoman Turks inflicted on local Christians the same attempted genocide they directed against the Armenians. By the 1920s, the once transcontinental Church of the East was reduced to about 40,000 survivors in the Mosul area. The church's patriarch today is based in Chicago.

But even then Christians did not forsake Mosul. The population included Assyrians, Catholic Chaldeans, Syrian Orthodox, and Orthodox Arabs, who hoped to benefit from the state secularism promised by Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime. If their ancient glories were long past, they hoped to remain unmolested in the land of the prophet Jonah and of the great patriarchs and abbots.

The Ba'ath regime was shaken by the 1991 Gulf War and then overthrown in the 2003 invasion led by the United States, which brought Islamist resistance to the fore. The ISIS campaign will presumably spell the end of a Christian presence.

We often read of the birth and growth of churches, very rarely of their deaths. In Mosul, however, we may be seeing the end of an astounding example of Christian continuity that lasted nearly two millennia.

CC

Mosul was a key center of spirituality for the Church of the East.

the city are St. Elijah's and St. Matthew (Mar Mattai), which date from the fourth century, Rabban Hormizd and Beth Abhe from the sixth or seventh, and many others: Mar Behnam, Mar Gewargis (St. George), Mar Mikhael (St. Michael). The greatest of these yielded nothing to such legendary houses as Monte Cassino or Iona. At its height, Mar Mattai was one of the greatest houses in the Christian world, with thousands of monks.

Around 850, Bishop Thomas of Marga described the lives of famous Syriac monks and holy men in his *Book of Governor*, which gives us a tantalizing picture of this lost spiritual world. Although his main interest was his own house of Beth Abhe, he mentions in passing dozens of small religious houses in the Mosul region, most of which we can no longer locate. The remains of many presumably survive under Iraqi village mosques.

The Church of the East that Thomas knew persisted for centuries, incredibly successfully considering it never enjoyed a close alliance with the secular state. Successively, the region was controlled by Zoroastrian Persians and by Muslim Arabs, but still the monasteries endured and flourished. In the histories of the 13th-century polymath Gregory Bar Hebraeus, the Mosul region appears as one of the hubs of the Christian universe.

Homô, the son of the priest Daniel, who lived in Alqosh, near Mosul.

Mosul retained its Christian significance in the 16th and 17th centuries, when Western Catholics arrived to bring those ancient believers into submission to Rome. The missionaries enjoyed some success. The ancient Eastern Church was split into pro-Roman factions, known as the Chaldeans, and the sturdily independent resisters, the Assyrians. In the long term though, those once bitter divisions would not matter too much. Both groups still exist—on a sadly diminished scale.

The fall of Christian Mosul loomed in

Church yard: Rebuilding the labyrinth

A curving trail—the callused field obscures it until we shovel out the clotted brick, lug a ton or two of sand to fit trenches, level rumpled earth, correct courses. A mallet stuns a thumb, new blisters bud as self-impressed we shout, “This row is done!” but then a kid names names, prefers George Toad, Kate Cricket, slaps William Mosquito, pats Barkly, unleashed, our best company. We rest and share cold drinks. David brings homemade muffins, burned, blueberry plenty. Sun flickers around us, summer's wings. Yet sand, we need more sand! Deer watch from trees while we adjust the pathways on our knees.

Elizabeth Rivers

Philip Jenkins's books include *The Lost History of Christianity*.

Ban on church construction angers Sudanese

Christians in Sudan frequently face arrests, impromptu questioning, and expulsion. But conditions worsened after the government announced a ban on the construction of new churches.

Shalil Abdullah, the Sudanese minister for guidance and religious endowments, made the announcement in July, sparking criticism from top Christian clerics who warned of shrinking worship space in the mainly Muslim and Arab north.

South Sudan became an independent nation in 2011, and many Christians moved to that country, which has a large Christian population. But a sizable number remained in Sudan.

Abdullah argued that there is no need to grant plots of land for new churches since the existing ones are enough.

Kori Elramla Kori Kuku, general secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches, said the government's intentions were shocking and misleading.

"We have the right to have new plots of land and building of new churches," he said. "We need the churches for the growing of Sudanese Christians."

Sudanese religious freedom became a rallying cry after the death sentence given to Meriam Yahya Ibrahim, a Christian doctor who was charged with apostasy. Ibrahim, 27, who is married to a U.S. citizen from South Sudan, was freed in late July. The family planned to settle in New England.

"We will begin a new life," Ibrahim told Antonella Napoli, head of Italians for Darfur, according to the daily *La Repubblica*. "My husband, a chemist, lost his job because of my event. Now we will go to New Hampshire, where my brother-in-law Gabriel lives. They will help us. We will be all together as a true family."

The Italian government had flown Ibrahim to Rome in secret on July 24 following an international campaign to free her. Lapo Pistelli, Italy's deputy foreign minister, said that authorities had returned Ibrahim's Sudanese passport the day before and told her that she could leave the country with her husband.

"When I was asked to renounce my Christian faith, I knew what I was risking," Ibrahim told *La Repubblica*. "But I did not want to renounce it."

Within hours of landing in Italy, Ibrahim met with Pope Francis, accompanied by her husband, Daniel Wani, their 20-month-old son, Martin, and their daughter, Maya. Ibrahim gave birth to Maya in chains in a Khartoum jail cell in May.

"I never believed I would fulfill my lifelong dream—to meet the pope," Ibrahim reportedly said. "I have always wanted and only wanted my faith. The love of my husband is a gift from God."

The pope thanked Ibrahim for her

courage and loyalty to her Christian faith despite facing threats of execution in an ordeal that lasted nearly a year. The Vatican's chief spokesman, Federico Lombardi, said Francis wanted the meeting to be a "gesture of support for all those who suffer for their faith, or [are] living in situations of difficulty or restraint."

Ibrahim had been trapped in Sudan since her release from prison where she was awaiting execution for refusing to renounce Christianity. Though Ibrahim grew up under the care of her Orthodox Christian mother and was admitted into the Catholic Church before her 2012 marriage, Sudan considered her a Muslim because her father is Muslim. Her father claimed she had abandoned Islam and committed adultery with her Christian husband, since interfaith marriages are considered illegal. The country's supreme court threw out the death sentence in June. —Josephine McKenna and Fredrick Nzwili, RNS



STIFLED: All Saints' Cathedral (Anglican) is located in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. Sudan's government says the nation needs no more churches.

Islamic State troops seize fourth-century monastery

A day after most of Mosul's Christians fled, Islamic State fighters stormed the fourth-century Mar Behnam monastery near the city.

They forced two priests, a monk, a guard, and a few families taking refuge there to leave the Syriac Catholic compound. Like many Christians fleeing from Mosul, which lies in the province of Nineveh, home to many historic Christian places of worship, the refugees traveled to the relative safety of Kurdish-controlled areas.

Faced with an ultimatum to convert to Islam, pay a religious tax, or be killed, most of Mosul's Christians had fled by July 19. The following day, militants descended on the monastery.

Iraq's second-largest city is now controlled by militants led by the Islamic State group, formerly known as ISIS, which has also taken over large swaths of the country, in addition to parts of Syria. Iraq's army, which Christians say never adequately protected them, fell quickly.

The Christians of Mosul are thought to have numbered 35,000 at the time of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. That number dropped to an estimated 3,000 more recently. Only a few hundred families remained in the city before the ultimatum, according to one resident. Among them are members of the Syriac Catholic Church, one of 22 Eastern Catholic churches, which are self-governing but enjoy full communion with Rome.

Left behind were many places of worship. Auxiliary Bishop Shlemon Warduni of Iraq's Chaldean Catholic Church said the monastery is "very ancient, and we have many ancient and important books in the library there."

"This is our house and our country," he said, adding that the militants are outsiders. "They have no right to treat Christians in this way."

The clerics from Mar Behnam fled to the Christian town of Qaraqosh, about 20 miles from Mosul. Qaraqosh is under Kurdish control.



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

CAPTURED: The Mar Behnam monastery, built in the fourth century, is located near the city of Mosul, Iraq, where ISIS fighters have expelled Christians.

Archbishop Petros from Mosul's Syriac Catholic Church said Qaraqosh is safe for now, and at least 250 Christian families have taken refuge there.

Petros described the Islamic State ultimatum to the Christians of Mosul as "a threat against humanity."

A Christian woman hanging laundry outside her temporary home in Ankawa, the Christian district of the Kurdish capital, Erbil, said that after militants took over Mosul the family was left without water and electricity. The family fled from Baghdad in 2005 to escape discrimination there and now finds itself on the move again. They are living in a small home with two other families in the Kurdish region.

"There is no stability in our lives," said the woman, who declined to give her name. "We are psychologically tired with this situation. I would leave Iraq at any opportunity, but we have no other place to go exactly."

Since the beginning of the year, when militants captured parts of Anbar Province in western Iraq, an estimated 1.2 million people have been displaced by violence.

Shi'ite Muslims, as well as Iraqi minorities such as Yazidis, Turkmen, and Shabaks, are particularly vulnerable to being killed or captured by the Islamic State fighters. Human rights groups have expressed concern about attacks by Shi'ite militias and government air strikes, as well as Islamic State raids.

The UN Security Council denounced the persecution of minorities in Iraq, condemning "in the strongest terms the systematic persecution of individuals from minority populations." —Cathy Otten, RNS

Faith communities divest from holdings in fossil fuel industry

Worried about global warming, a growing number of churches and other faith groups are divesting their holdings in fossil fuel companies that release large amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

"The warning in scripture that 'the wages of sin is death' could not be more literally true than it is in the case of fossil fuels," said Serene Jones, president of New York's Union Theological Seminary, whose board voted earlier this summer to divest its \$108.4 million endowment from fossil fuel companies.

"While we realize that our endowment alone will hardly cause the fossil fuel giants to miss even half a heartbeat, as a seminary dedicated to social justice we have a critical call to live out our values in the world. Climate change poses a catastrophic threat, and as stewards of God's creation we simply must act."

Jones talks about her seminary's divestment from fossil fuel holdings as an act of repentance that may resonate well beyond the school.

"It is on moral grounds that we pursue divestment, and on theological grounds that we trust it matters," she said. "The Christian term for this reckless hope in the power of God to use our decisions of conscience to transform the world is *resurrection*, and I have faith in the power of resurrection."

Other religious institutions that have recently voted to divest from fossil fuels include the World Council of Churches (July 10), the Unitarian Universalists (June 28), and the United Church of Christ (July 2013). Many smaller and regional groups—such as the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, the Shalom Center, and the Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—have also approved fossil fuel divestment.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in June voted to study the issue.

Motivating these moves among the



‘RECKLESS HOPE’: Activists support fossil fuel divestment in front of the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Bascom Hall in April.

faithful is the concern that their investments ally them with companies identified as among the most damaging to the environment.

Many religious supporters of fossil fuel divestment were further spurred by the *National Climate Assessment*, a federal report written with the help of 300 experts and the National Academy of Sciences. It concluded that climate change is proceeding at a faster pace than previously thought. It also laid blame at the feet of fossil fuels.

“While scientists continue to refine projections of the future, observations unequivocally show that climate is changing and that the warming of the past 50 years is primarily due to human-induced emissions of heat-trapping gases,” the report reads. “These emissions come mainly from burning coal, oil, and gas, with additional contributions from forest clearing and some agricultural practices.”

The American Petroleum Institute offers a more sanguine view, one at odds with the scientific community.

“The oil and natural gas industry is leading the way in lowering carbon emissions,” said American Petroleum Institute spokesman Carlton Carroll.

Many divestment advocates say that only Congress (the United States is one of the largest producers of greenhouse gases) and the international community

can enact the limitations needed to stave off the worst environmental disasters that climate change promises, including extreme weather and the eradication of species.

But momentum is still building for smaller-scale action in churches and other religious institutions, said Susan Stephenson, executive director of Interfaith Power and Light, a multifaith group fighting global warming.

“They see that this is a way that they can express their values,” she said.

Unitarian Universalist investment in fossil fuels—less than 3 percent of its \$175 million endowment—is typical of religious institutions that have divested or are considering fossil fuel divestment in that the sum is unlikely to hurt energy companies’ bottom lines.

Worries about the economic impact of their divestment vote don’t seem to dissuade many congregants presented with a fossil fuel divestment option. Stephenson said those calling for fossil fuel divestment are mindful that the industry is a big employer and are encouraging investment in so-called clean energy, such as solar and wind power.

“These are jobs that are going to be changing the economy, that are on the economy’s leading edge,” she said. “And it’s very important to help folks who are working in fossil fuel industries to get retrained.” —Lauren Markoe, RNS

Churches seen as failing to welcome people with disabilities

A four-year-old with impaired vision is not allowed in the toddler class in church and is forced to remain in the nursery.

The mother of a child with dwarfing syndrome is told her church cannot provide a stool to allow her daughter to reach the bathroom sink because it would be an insurance risk.

A minister refuses to visit a family’s home because their teen with autism makes him feel uncomfortable.

These stories, reported in a study of more than 400 parents of children with special needs, illustrate how far behind many religious congregations are in understanding and inclusion of people with disabilities.

Just 43 percent of the 416 parents surveyed described their religious community as “supportive,” researchers from the University of Kentucky and Vanderbilt University found.

Almost a third of parents reported having changed their place of worship because their child had not been included or welcomed. More than half kept their sons or daughters from participating in a religious activity because of lack of support.

The lack of inclusion is of special concern because faith communities often help develop supportive social networks in challenging situations. The more frequently children with special needs attended religious services, the higher parents rated their family lives together, sociologist Andrew Whitehead of Clemson University found in analyzing data from the 2011–2012 National Study of Children’s Health. Those positive outcomes included being better able to cope with the day-to-day demands of raising children with special needs.

How can churches, mosques, and synagogues include the faithful who are disabled? Researchers identified seven areas:

1. Communication: Adults with disabilities and parents of children with spe-

cial needs need to be able to communicate with the congregation about what is required for their participation and how they can work with the community toward full inclusion.

And they need to know that their needs will be heard, Whitehead said. In the survey of parents of children with disabilities, more than half the parents said they had never been asked about the best way to include their daughter or son in religious activities.

2. Accessibility: A basic requirement is that congregations accommodate the physical needs of individuals, by providing handicapped access, amplified audio, or sign language.

In one congregation, a wheelchair-bound child could not attend Sunday school because it was held in an inaccessible area, a mother reported. Church leaders said carrying the youth downstairs was too great a liability risk.

3. Support: Including the disabled in congregational life goes beyond adding a new sound system or a wheelchair ramp.

For example, people with autism or Down syndrome may need an aide or a peer assistant to participate in religious education classes and vacation Bible schools.

Offering worship alternatives such as a shorter service with contemporary music may allow for greater participation for individuals with attention-related issues.

4. Leadership: Faith communities where leaders are committed to including people with disabilities were more welcoming, offered greater opportunities for people with disabilities to share their gifts, and were more physically accessible, according to a primarily web-based survey of 160 respondents conducted by Vanderbilt University researchers.

5. Participation: Inviting people with disabilities to serve on boards and committees and to take visible roles in congregational life—from greeters to readers to worship planners—is an important sign that they are valued members of the community.

Building inclusive communities “is not just about welcoming people with disabilities, but truly including them and

respecting what they have to contribute to the community,” said Megan Griffin, lead researcher in the Vanderbilt study, in a recent interview.

6. Education: Congregations that educate their members on disability issues and work together with disability-related organizations are also more welcoming and better able to integrate people with special needs into the life of the community, studies find.

7. Love: The attitudes of fellow congregants may be the most critical factor in whether a religious community is inclusive. In studies, parents of children with special needs who experienced love and acceptance reported their congregations were sources of great strength and support.

In cases where disapproval or censure replaces love, however, the results can be devastating for both people with special needs and their families, the research indicates. Some may abandon their spiritual home or even their faith.

Such disapproval “basically just sends a message you’re not wanted here,” said Whitehead, former director of the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, in a recent interview. “It just makes you feel worthless, that it would be better if you weren’t there.”

The good news is that just about any congregation can serve the disabled. The Vanderbilt study found that factors such as congregation size, the number of people with disabilities, or its location in an urban, suburban, or rural setting did not make a significant difference.

“That’s really an empowering sort of message,” Griffin said. “Ultimately, faith leaders can promote the inclusion of people with disabilities.”

And everyone benefits when congregations embody love and acceptance for all members, several studies have found. As one mother noted, her young-adult daughter with a moderate-to-severe intellectual disability did not have a sophisticated theological grasp of her faith. Yet she “helped the members of that community to have a better understanding of God. . . . She kind of radiates love.” —David Briggs, theARDA.com

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The ‘Philadelphia 11’: Looking back on a breakthrough moment

On July 29, 1974, in Philadelphia, 11 women broke rank and were ordained as the first female priests in the Episcopal Church. They became known as the Philadelphia 11.

While there was no law explicitly prohibiting the ordination of women, there also was no law allowing it. After the Philadelphia action at the Church of the Advocate, the 11 women were deemed “irregularly” ordained, and Episcopal bishops warned the church not to recognize the women as priests.

Two years later, the Episcopal Church’s General Convention affirmed and authorized the ordination of women to the priesthood.

In the 40 years since, the Philadelphia 11 have taken varied paths.

Merrill Bittner After ordination: in 1976, announced that she would “no longer affiliate myself with the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.”

Alla Bozarth-Campbell After ordination: founded Wisdom House, a Minneapolis-based interfaith spirituality center. Now: retired, writes poems as ministry.

Her advice for women in the church today: “If there are barriers, and yet the women feel called to those areas which are still blocked to them in their traditions, I would encourage them to do what the Roman Catholic women have been doing. And that is get together, pray together, pray for guidance together, and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it emerges.”

Alison Cheek After ordination: served in St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Annandale, Virginia. Now retired.

Advice: “The advice I used to give women back at the time was, only get ordained if you can’t help it and if you want to change the church. And I think that still holds; I think it still isn’t always easy for woman priests.”

Emily Hewitt After ordination: became assistant professor of religion



PIONEERS: Some of the first women ordained in the Episcopal Church gathered in May 2004 at the Episcopal Divinity School. First row: from left, Alison Palmer and Lee McGee (ordained in 1975). Middle row: Nancy Wittig, Alison Cheek, and Merrill Bittner. Back row: Emily Hewitt, Carter Heyward, and Marie Moorefield Fleischer.

and education at Andover Newton Theological School (1973–1975). Now: retired from being chief judge of the United States Court of Federal Claims, October 2013.

Advice: “I cheer on the women, without whom the church, living as long as it is, would barely be able to go on. I mean, this is a lot of the muscle of the church.”

Carter Heyward After ordination: joined the faculty at the Episcopal Divinity School. Now: retired in 2005, helps run and teaches at a therapeutic horseback center.

Advice: “Stay aware of ways in which the church does and does not empower women to be fully who they are. And to really work to celebrate the things that have happened on our behalf and to really fight for the changes that are needed. And also to keep connection with other people who are struggling for justice.”

Suzanne Hiatt After ordination: was on the faculty of the Episcopal Divinity School until retirement. Died May 30, 2002.

Marie Moorefield After ordination: served as chaplain at the United Methodist Retirement Home in Topeka, Kansas (1973–1975). She returned to the Episcopal Church in the 1980s.

Jeannette Piccard After ordination: served in St. Paul, Minnesota, until 1981. Died May 17, 1981.

Betty Bone Schiess After ordination: served as chaplain at Syracuse University from 1976–1978. Now: retired, “sitting here at 91 with my 93-year-old husband, enjoying life.”

Advice: “I would certainly endorse what is already being endorsed, that is, to have women be in the public arena. Because what happens in the law of the country and everyplace else affects women, so they should have a say in what happens.”

Katrina Swanson After ordination: worked at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in St. Louis. Died August 27, 2005.

Nancy Wittig After ordination: did supply work for the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, New Jersey. Now: retired, with a part-time job at St. Peter Episcopal Church in Lakewood, Ohio.

Advice: “Don’t assume there’s no prejudice about women. Don’t assume just because you’re very smart and have a good education, that will pave the way. There will be a lot of bumps along the way. But don’t give up, stay faithful, show up, and remember it’s not your ministry, it’s Christ’s.”
—Heather Adams, RNS

Americans most friendly toward Jews, Catholics, and evangelicals

A Pew Research survey finds that U.S. adults feel most warmly about people who share their religion or those they know as family, friends, or coworkers. Americans give the highest scores to Jews, Catholics, and evangelicals. In a zero-to-100 ‘thermometer’ scale featured in the survey, “How Americans Feel about Religious Groups,” released July 16, those three groups are nestled within a few degrees of each other: Jews, 63; Catholics, 62; evangelicals, 61.

In the middle of the chart were Buddhists, 53; Hindus, 50; and Mormons, 48. Trending toward the chilly negative zone: atheists at 41 and Muslims at 40.

Pew did the survey because “understanding the question of how religious groups view each other is valuable in a country where religion plays an important role in public life,” said Greg Smith, Pew’s associate director of religion research.

America’s largest groups—Catholics and Protestants—benefit from self-regard. Pew found that people rate their own groups higher than others. Still, the groups’ overall average scores are pulled down by those who don’t share these faiths. Catholics give themselves a score of 80 while non-Catholics give them a 58. Evangelical Christians score 79 with people who call themselves “born-again” or evangelical, but only 52 with others.

“People are somewhat polarized about evangelicals,” Smith said. The survey finds “roughly as many people give evangelicals a cold rating (27 percent) as give them a warm rating (30 percent).”

White evangelicals gave their highest score to Jews, 69. However, all that warmth is not reciprocated. Jews gave evangelicals overall a score of 34.

White evangelicals are leery of other non-Christians and downright chilly toward nonbelievers. They rank Buddhists at 39, Hindus at 38, and atheists at 25—the lowest score of any group.

Among the major findings:

- We like people we know. People who say they personally know someone from another group rated them ten to 20 points higher. That gap is widest for atheists—falling from a rating of 50 by people who know an atheist to 29 by those who say they don’t. Buddhists’ rating falls from 70 to 48.

- Age matters. Christian groups and Jews receive higher ratings from Americans ages 65 and older, a group that identifies overwhelmingly (85 percent) as Christian, according to Pew. But adults under age 30, with fewer self-identified Christians (59 percent), give their highest ratings to non-Christians.

- Race matters, too. Muslims receive a neutral rating from black people (49 on average), but Muslims are rated more coldly by whites (38). According to a 2011 Pew survey, 23 percent of Muslims in the United States are black. And 57 percent of black people say they know someone who is Muslim; among white people, that figure is 34 percent.

[Katherine E. Ritchey of the Pew Research Center, in an e-mail to the CHRISTIAN CENTURY, acknowledged that mainline Protestants were not among the eight groups asked about in the survey, though they were included among those surveyed.]

Ritchey said, "We did not ask Americans to rate 'mainline Protestants' on the thermometer because it is uncertain how many Americans would understand and be familiar with the term."

The survey was conducted between May 30 and June 30 with a nationally representative panel of 3,217 randomly selected adults—2,849 people answering the survey online and 368 responding by mail. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.2 percentage points.

The Pew results match closely with a similar "feelings thermometer" study in 2007 conducted by Robert Putnam and David Campbell for their 2010 book, *American Grace*.

Campbell, a political scientist at the University of Notre Dame, said he was struck that Pew found that "there hasn't been any real change in views on Mormons in spite of [the hit Broadway musical] *The Book of Mormon* and Mitt Romney's presidential campaign."
—Cathy Lynn Grossman, RNS

Special liturgy atones for outbreak of Great War

Half a world away from Europe, where World War I erupted 100 years ago on July 28, Washington National Cathedral marked the occasion with a liturgy created especially for the anniversary.

But the service was about more than remembrance. It was about atonement—atonement for the 16 million killed in the conflict and the more than 20 million wounded, many of them horribly disfigured in trench warfare that kept much of the four-year conflict at a stalemate.

"I was struggling with praying for the beginning of a war," said Gina Campbell, the Washington, D.C., cathedral's canon precentor and the author of the World War I liturgy. "I was trying to put my

mind around how one prays for the beginning of a war. I thought it would need to be profoundly penitential, that the way one would approach the disaster that is World War I would have to be in deep penitence."

Campbell crafted the liturgy at the request of Congress's World War I Centennial Commission, which is organizing memorial events around the country for the next four years. She was part of a committee that included Episcopal bishop Jay Magness (who oversees military chaplains), retired navy chaplain Wollum Jensen, the cathedral's music director, and others. They and the cathedral have made the liturgy available online for other houses of worship to use or adapt.

"One hundred years ago, an assassin's bullet plunges the nations of the world into violence unlike any the world has ever seen," the service's litany of prayer begins, before citing the number of dead and wounded, including civilians.

"From the fields of Flanders to the forests of Verdun to the peninsula of Gallipoli, the dead cry out: life and love interrupted; hope and promise laid waste; war, war, and more war. Forgive us!"

Campbell worked to craft an interfaith service, relying heavily on the Hebrew Bible for readings and leaving out the name of Jesus in most of the prayers.

"I wanted to reach as many kinds of worshiping communities as possible because in World War I there were huge numbers of Muslims fighting, huge numbers of Jews," she said. "This was not a Christian war, and the prayers should reflect that."

She also tried to make sure the service did more than mark a great conflict.

"I thought, this can't just be a commemoration, this has to speak to a contemporary situation as well," she said. "Church is not just about remembering, it is about remembering forward. We have to bring it into the present and into God's hope for our future."

The Conference of European Churches and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe have also created relevant resources. Bishop Stephen Platten of the Church of England has crafted a liturgy as well: "For all the boots of the tramping warriors / and all the garments rolled in blood / shall be burned as fuel for the fire,"

the service's Old Testament canticle begins. "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us, / and the government will be on his shoulders."

—Kimberly Winston, RNS

People

■ **Neville Callam** has been reelected to another five years in office as general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance by its General Council at its meeting in Izmir, Turkey, in July. His new term begins in 2015. Callam, a Jamaican, became the first person who is neither North American nor European to lead the 42-million-member global Baptist organization when he was elected in 2007. Callam came to the office of general secretary at a time of major constitutional and operational changes within the organization. Callam shepherded the BWA through the financial crisis and global economic recession with minimal dislocations and impact on the operations of the BWA and its staff. BWA membership has grown since Callam came into office, moving from 214 to 231 member organizations in 121 countries and territories.

■ **Elenie Huszagh**, president of the National Council of Churches from 2002 to 2003, died July 11. Huszagh, a member of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, was the first Orthodox layperson and the first Orthodox woman to serve in the office. She was also only one of six laypersons to serve as president in the NCC's history. "She represented the council during crucial events in world history, including the war in Iraq that began in March 2003," said Jim Winkler, president and general secretary of the NCC. "The council and many other religious groups worked hard to head off the war, and Elenie's shrewd legal mind and no-nonsense analysis of the situation served us well." In her own church, she gave leadership to the Archdiocesan Council and the Biennial Clergy-Laity Congresses. In 1996, she was awarded the Medal of St. Paul, the highest honor that the archdiocese bestows upon a layperson.

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, August 24
Romans 12:1-8

IN 1988, Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. It is a narrative account of a former slave's memories of post-Civil War Ohio. The story includes a "dean" of preachers—"Baby Suggs, holy"—who delivers an unforgettable sermon to those listening in a clearing in the woods.

In this sermon, Baby Suggs urges the hearers to love their flesh, because "out yonder" other people do not love it. But she does more than this. She also uses her body, particularly her twisted hip, as the climax of her heartfelt sermon, while the community brings it to a close with music.

Baby Suggs talks about the body and uses her own body to preach a word of hope and life to those in dire need of love. It's a timely word; the people's black bodies have been mistreated and deemed ugly and worthless. Baby Suggs's explicit exhortation to love the flesh—that is, to love the body; it is not the Pauline idea of "flesh" she has in mind—suggests the important role of the human body in life in general and the religious life in particular.

The apostle Paul seems to suggest the same to the church at Rome. He appeals to these Christians, in light of the "mercies of God" he has just written about, to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice." Bodies matter for Paul (see also Rom. 6:6, 6:12, and 8:23). And they matter for Christian discipleship. Paul foregrounds the human body as critical for the Christian response to God's mercy.

Historically, of course, Christians have often appeared to be apathetic toward the body and its significance in the Christian life, or they have viewed it as antispiritual. At times, Christians have taught that one should escape the body or "material things" in order to grow spiritually. This perspective suffers from theological amnesia when it comes to the incarnation of God in the human body of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God embraces the body and implicitly affirms human bodies as significant for the spiritual life.

When the body is deemed unimportant, anyone can be treated in any way. Such treatment, after all, is believed to be disconnected from the spiritual life. This results in brutal slavery, the context of *Beloved*. It results as well in the exploitation of women's bodies and the sex trafficking of children's bodies. An antibody perspective will lead to inhumane actions against other humans—even in the church. Little bodies are the most vulnerable, as we've seen in the track record of sexual abuse in the church.

Inhumane, antibody actions imply an antihuman mind-set. But to be human is to have a body, and a body is part of Christian spirituality. To be Christian, as Paul implies, is to have a body and to be a part of a body.

For Paul, a bodily sacrifice is "holy and acceptable," but it is also "spiritual worship." Materiality is vital to spirituality. Followers of Jesus are embodied, corporeally and corporately. One's body, one's whole self, is offered to God, which means this sacrifice is not just a mental exercise. It involves the entire body of a community. A "living sacrifice" is a sacrifice that is embodied daily. It is not dead but alive, and it manifests through everyday behavior. Just as one's body travels from place to place, one's spiritual worship is not limited to a specific domain but travels as well.

Paul's ancient metaphor of body is also a social metaphor: it implies unity among diversity (see also 1 Cor. 12:4-31). So it should not be surprising that the living sacrificial bodies are acceptable and good as they remember "the one body in Christ." One sacrifices the individual body for the corporate body: one should not "think of yourself more highly than you ought to think," because in this body there are "many members, and not all the members have the same function."

Yet everyone in this community has gifts, and everyone has received grace from God. The gifts are different, but they are all vital to the wholeness of the one body. Individual bodies are different as well but ultimately form "one body." Furthermore, Paul teaches that the individuals "are members one of another." To make a corporate body of Christ, one needs the individual bodies to sacrifice for the larger whole.

This is an indication of transformation—and of a lack of conformity to the world's norm. The one holy, living body implies that people are interconnected, forming a mutual web of loving sacrifice. There is an ethical thrust embedded in this notion.

But here, Paul insists that in the Christian life, bodies matter. Everybody is a somebody, because in the kingdom of Christ there are no nobodies. Every body matters because the body of Christ matters. No body should be excluded.

During the civil rights movement, African-American men enduring racism lifted signs that read "I Am a Man." They did this to assert their humanity and to help others recognize that their black bodies mattered. This was an attempt to represent a renewed mind in the one body, and a renewed embrace of any body—a body whose ultimate end is redemption (Rom. 8:23) and resurrection (1 Cor. 15).

There is no room for a disembodied faith, because humanity's future has a body. We can't escape it, and neither Paul nor Baby Suggs would want us to—because it is holy.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, August 31
Cyril 174-21

ABOUT A DECADE ago, I met a man at an Episcopal Church in Atlanta. His name was Clackston, but I didn't know that at first. I approached to greet him and asked him his name. He said, "Get out of here! Get out of here!"

I was taken by surprise by this unusual greeting; I knew this wasn't normal protocol for Episcopalians. But then someone told me about Clackston's journey. He always greeted people that way, because he had come to believe that "Get out of here!" was his name. After all, that's what everybody always said to him.

It was as if Clackston had internalized the lack of welcome he received throughout his life. He began to believe that his first name was "Get Out" and his last name was "Of Here." I learned further that he was dealing with mental health issues—while also finding that his struggles led others to deem him nonhuman.

My initial encounter with Clackston was uncomfortable, but it was appropriate that I met him on church grounds. Isn't the church supposed to be an oasis of hospitality and a spiritual hospital for the sick? Arthur Sutherland writes that "hospitality is the practice by which the church stands and falls." That Episcopal parish in Atlanta stood tall as it welcomed Clackston into its community. There should be no need for congregations to make outdoor signs that say "We are a welcoming church," because the church should be known as a womb of warm welcome for anybody.

Obviously, this is not always the case. Christians need to be reminded of fundamentals like the practice of love and hospitality.

After affirming each body and the one body of Christ, the apostle Paul reminds the church at Rome how to live in community inside and outside the church. He is very explicit about the embodied Christian ethic required in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul's theology is grounded in communal and social ethical practice, and he frames his ethical imperatives with love. "Let love be genuine," he says. This is not the exuberant rhetorical surplus we find in 1 Corinthians 13, but love is still Paul's guiding principle for life in community. We are to live by the command to love: "Love one another with mutual affection."

It is not a mere suggestion. Paul makes this clear with his staccato imperatives: hold fast, love, be ardent, serve, rejoice, persevere, contribute, extend, bless, and so on. There is no wiggle room in determining what he means by his words. Like a fireball preacher, Paul is making it plain even as he draws on scriptural tradition. It is clear that what Paul teaches is perti-

nent to the church's relations not just internally but also externally. There is congruity between the two, just as there is only one body, and it cannot be divided.

That's why Paul can say both "contribute to the needs of the saints" and "extend hospitality to strangers." Saints and strangers alike should receive genuine love, because hospitality does not discriminate. In the current debates about immigration, Paul's injunction to welcome strangers is particularly apropos. He does not promote fear of the unknown. He even seems unfazed by the presence of evil.

Paul's teaching theme is risky: "Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good. . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." His letter arrives in an atmosphere of threat and intimidation toward believers. Paul is not naive about such persecution, yet he calls for a risky and humble hospitality. This is a pastoral approach, a stance of humility. But it is also risky, because such hospitable love opens oneself up to the possibility of hostility. Doing good toward another does not mean this person will respond with good toward you.

Yet etymologically, *hostility* is built right into the word *hospitality*. Hospitality is inherently risky, because it contains its opposite within it. According to philosopher Jacques Derrida,

Clackston had internalized the lack of hospitality he had received.

hospitality says "Let the other come!"—whoever or whatever that other is. A person who welcomes may end up with wounds.

Brother Roger, the founder of the Taizé Community in France, lived this. The Taizé Community is an ecumenical community founded after World War II as a sign of reconciliation between divided people. Every year it welcomes thousands of guests who seek silence, prayer, peace, and community. During one of Taizé's common prayer services in 2005, Brother Roger—who was 90 years old—was fatally stabbed by a woman who the community knew to be struggling with mental health issues. Brother Roger's hospitality welcomed the risk of hostility. His hospitality literally killed him.

Individuals and communities are made vulnerable by being hospitable. Paul knows this, yet the service of Christ requires hospitality anyway. Jesus died because of hospitality, and we may die too—but in that dying, evil will be overcome with good.

The author is Luke Powery, dean of Duke Chapel and associate professor of homiletics at Duke Divinity School.

Theology and misconduct

by David Cramer, Jenny Howell, Paul Martens, and Jonathan Tran

THIRTY YEARS AFTER John Howard Yoder was first accused of sexual misconduct and almost two decades after his death in 1997, the story of his abusive behavior remains painfully unresolved in the Mennonite communities in which he was for decades regarded as the foremost theologian and chief representative of Anabaptist thought.

During his lifetime Yoder faced two separate disciplinary proceedings. The first led to his 1984 resignation from the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries (now Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary) in Elkhart, Indiana, after which he became a full-time professor at the University of Notre Dame, where he taught until his death. The second was conducted by the Mennonite Church from 1992 to 1996.

Last year a third discernment process was launched, spurred by women who believe that the church has repeatedly failed to uncover and acknowledge the truth.

In 2013, Ruth Krall, professor emeritus at Goshen College, a Mennonite school in Indiana, published *The Elephants in God's Living Room*, which used the church's response to Yoder's actions as a case study on how sexual abuse is often mishandled in the church. That same year, Barbra Graber, a retired professor at Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia, wrote a pair of online essays about Yoder's case. Soon after Graber's essays appeared, AMBS president Sara Wenger Shenk announced that the seminary had committed itself to "new transparency in the truth telling that must happen." Last summer the Mennonite Church USA formed a committee to "fairly and accurately document the scope of Yoder's sexual abuse and the church's response to it after a careful review of the evidence."

While most of the allegations against Yoder involve his work in Mennonite circles, some reported incidents occurred outside that sphere. Theologian Marva Dawn, a onetime doctoral student at Notre Dame, said that Yoder "made a few of the intimate moves others have accused him of making" while he was at Notre Dame.

Reports indicate that Yoder initiated many of the relationships and behaviors unilaterally, without anything resembling an invitation, and that these actions resulted in lifelong consequences for the women involved.

One woman who made public her story is Carolyn Holderread Heggen. She reported that Yoder sent her letters and asked for meetings, which she refused. In one letter, he invited Heggen to meet him at a conference, where he could watch her undress and nurse her infant.

"When I read the letter," Heggen said (as quoted in a 1992 article by Tom Price in the *Elkhart Truth*), "I felt I had been raped. The thought of this dirty old man sitting at his seminary desk fantasizing about my nude body was terrifying to me, and I felt extremely violated and angry."

Other reports cite acts of verbal intimidation, physical aggression, indecent exposure, and other types of physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual manipulation and violence.

Yoder's conduct is, of course, deeply reprehensible. His failings are of particular concern to the many people who have been deeply influenced—as the four of us have—by his theo-

With his behavior, Yoder betrayed his own theology.

logical writing. What does this personal behavior tell us, if anything, about his theological project? What follows is an attempt to make a theological reckoning of Yoder's behavior in light of his own theology.

The most glaring issue is the contradiction between his behavior and his long-standing commitment to Christian nonviolence. Yoder is probably the best known and most influential advocate in the 20th century for Christian pacifism. Yoder's christological pacifism disallowed the use of force even to protect society's most vulnerable people. Yet it appears he used force against vulnerable people, namely, the women who came under his influence as a teacher and scholar.

Though Yoder wrote about nonviolence primarily in the context of war, his own definition of violence was much broader. The term *violence* is meaningless, he once wrote, "apart from the concept of that which is being violated. That which is violated is the dignity or integrity of some being."

He went on: "As soon as either verbal abuse or bodily coercion moves beyond that border line of loving enhancement of the dignity of persons, we are being violent. The extremes of the two dimensions are of course killing and the radical kind of

David Cramer and Jenny Howell are doctoral students and Paul Martens and Jonathan Tran are on the faculty in the religion department at Baylor University. A longer version of their essay is posted at bit.ly/jhyoder.



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insult which Jesus in Matthew 5 indicates *is just as bad*. I believe it is a Christian imperative always to respect the dignity of every person: I must never willingly or knowingly violate that dignity” (emphasis added).

This description of violence not only describes Yoder’s intrusive behaviors; it sounds ready-made for that purpose. In fact, Yoder writes that in Latin “the verb ‘to violate’ is the same as the verb ‘to rape’: it refers to the purity or integrity or self-determination of a woman” (emphasis added). If one uses as a litmus test Yoder’s own theology—which configures Christian discipleship as nonviolence and links the kingdom of God with the church’s peaceableness—it is clear that he violated his own tenets.

Yoder’s response to the various disciplinary proceedings he encountered reveals another inconsistency. According to almost every account, he resisted being held accountable. Two particular instances can be highlighted.

Marlin Miller served as president of AMBS in the 1980s during and after Yoder’s time there, and it fell to Miller to deal with the problems Yoder created for the seminary’s students and staff. Women affected by Yoder’s behavior apparently felt safe in reporting to Miller, so he did not lack evidence. Various sources tell of Miller’s substantial collection of files documenting Yoder’s behavior. The women’s willingness to report Yoder’s behavior and Miller’s willingness to compile those reports would seem to indicate that AMBS had a strong case against Yoder.

But one thing stood in the way of holding Yoder accountable: John Howard Yoder. No matter how often and how determinedly Miller dealt with him, Yoder refused to admit to any wrongdoing. And this went on for years. People with knowledge of the situation almost universally recount two things: Miller’s valiant efforts and Yoder’s bullying defiance.

When ecclesial accountability groups tried to discipline Yoder in the early 1990s, they sought to operate along the very

lines Yoder himself championed in describing discipline in the church. In his 1992 book *Body Politics*, Yoder describes the ecclesial activity of “binding and loosing” (Matt. 18:15–20):

That promised guide, the Holy Spirit, will operate in the community to make present, for hitherto unforeseen times and places and questions, the meaning of the call of Jesus. It uses a fully human communication process, called by rabbis “binding and loosing.” It has about it elements of what today would be called conflict resolution. It gathers up the resources of human wisdom, the perspectives of several kinds of involvement in different ways of perceiving a question, and loving processes of negotiation, all of this guided and enabled by God’s own presence.

Yoder’s teaching on communal binding and loosing—which shows up regularly in his work from the 1960s through the 1990s—is not unrelated to his work on pacifism. He envisions the work of binding and loosing, which can be understood as a Christian approach to conflict resolution, as integral to the very form and rationale of christological pacifism.

But when Yoder himself came under the scope of Matthew 18, he argued that his accusers needed to meet with him face to face—a gloss on how to read Matthew 18 that he explicitly rejected in some of his writings, including *The Royal Priesthood*. Dealing with the practicalities of binding and loosing, Yoder there wrote:

If the standards appealed to by those who would reprove someone are inappropriate, the best way to discover this is through the procedure of person-to-person conversation with reconciling intent. Thus the group’s standards can be challenged, tested and confirmed, or changed as is found necessary, in the course of their being applied. The result of the process, whether it ends with the standards being

changed or reconfirmed, is to record a new decision as part of the common background of the community, thus accumulating further moral insights by which to be guided in the future.

Face-to-face encounter is allowed and may even be required, but not necessarily between accuser and accused, as in a court of law. One can certainly imagine instances in which a reconciling process requires that accuser and accused be in the same room. But one can equally imagine an accountability group judging such a confrontation to be unhelpful to the disciplinary process. Deciding between those two possible forms of discernment is as important, according to Yoder's writings, as the content of whatever is discerned, and the onus of its adjudication falls on the working group and the relevant parties, not on the accused victimizer and his alleged victims.

It is only by stretching some parts and ignoring others that Yoder can make his theology of binding and loosing require victims to face their victimizer face to face. And in no way does Yoder in his writings allow for one person to determine the course of the group's work. Even if Yoder thought—as he did—that the accountability group did not pass muster, that it was doing the bidding of what he referred to as “the Mennonite women's posse,” it would not be up to him exclusively to render that judgment.

By his reinterpretation of a text central to Anabaptist disci-

pline, Yoder created a defensive scheme that was unfortunately effective. The irony then and now is unmistakable: Yoder viewed himself as above the very fraternal admonition that he demanded of others.

Do Yoder's violations of his own theological claims undermine the content of his theology? Do his sins disqualify him from the major role he has played in modern Christian thought? We certainly understand the seriousness of these questions. It is undoubtedly difficult to know how to receive gifts from sinful people. But ever since the church settled the Donatist controversy in the early fifth century, the church has agreed that such gifts can and should be received.

Reading theology is not as simple as picking between heroes and villains; more difficult and more worthwhile is examining the histories that produced theological texts and how God makes use of them.

People who find Yoder's theology helpful do so because they see it as articulating what God in Christ asks of them in the scriptures, as clarified by the broad theological tradition. Even if they got rid of all of Yoder's books, they would still find themselves facing the truths to which Yoder bore (a deeply flawed) witness.

Yet another problem must be confronted. It may be that Yoder's actions were, in his mind, not just convenient exceptions to this theology but consistent with his own theology. There is some evidence that in pursuing Christian women, Yoder might have been applying his own understanding of radical theology.

In his 1971 book *The Original Revolution*, Yoder describes the “original revolution” as “the creation of a distinct community with its own deviant set of values and its coherent way of incarnating them.” In his 1984 text, *The Priestly Kingdom*, he describes this “minority community” as the kingdom's “first fruits,” writing, “The church is called to be now what the world is called to be ultimately” and that “the confessing people of God is the new world on its way.” Such a vision of the church has been enthusiastically adopted by many of Yoder's readers on matters of justice, peace, and democracy.

Yet Yoder also included among the “pilot programs” of the church the realization of physically intimate relationships among men and women within the church who might be single or married to others. Since the early 1970s, Yoder had been circulating for public consideration reformulations of family, sexuality, and intimacy that he thought the Holy Spirit was calling the church to make. In these writings (sometimes sent to the women he contacted), Yoder challenged the idols of romantic love that denigrated singleness as a proper Christian vocation. In pursuing what he called “nongenital affective relationships” with

Song to hum while opening mail from a friend

O the very fact that there are friends who write with their hands
Even if just the forefingers hammering away on keyboards, and
Also then print out the resulting muddle and scrawl and scribble
And pop it in the postbox! The lickable areas on the envelopes!
The Return Address Just in Case! The choice of stamps, and we
All blessedly have friends who carefully choose their stamps, &
Stand in line at the post office asking for the ones with Authors,
Or members of the Simpson family, or stamps with Polar Bears!
And the fact that there are fifty addresses in your memory, some
Of them no longer inhabited by the people you loved to write to;
Much like your mind retains past phone numbers and exchanges,
Like Mayfair and Ludlow and Allegheny and Cypress and Tulip!
And the fact that you can draw all morning on an envelope or by
God paint it flagrantly with horses and angels, and your postman
Will deliver it anyway! Probably grinning at the nut who mailed
It to you! And you can put a few grains of sand inside your note,
From the beach we went to as children, or a feather from a hawk
Who glared in the window like an insurance adjuster with talons,
Or a painting by a child, or a photograph of four of the names of
That which we call God for lack of a better label. Even the folds
Of the paper, and the paperiness of the paper, and the fact that it's
All about miracles and affection, which is to say, of course, love!
Sure it is. All the good parts are about love, in all its many masks.

Brian Doyle

women, Yoder may very well have seen himself “incarnating” the “deviant set of values” of this “distinct community.” Apparently, as strange as it may be, Yoder believed that his actions, often misunderstood as abusive, were really serving to incarnate a revolutionary “new world.”

If we are not going to abandon Yoder’s theology after all that has happened, and if we want to make use of it in light of those happenings, we suggest that the source material for doing so lies in his most famous work, *The Politics of Jesus*, where Yoder talks about “the powers” as 1) created for good; 2) fallen and corrupted; and 3) redemptively still used by God in God’s providential restoration of creation. By “powers,” Yoder meant those structures that God has set in place to order crea-

God providentially uses the fallen for good.

turely life. When in working condition, creation is ordered by these powers toward its own flourishing.

In Yoder’s life, such powers might be seen as the structures through which he practiced his teaching vocation, the relational structures of a large family in which he and his wife brought up five children, and the professional theological world through which Yoder could disseminate his work. “These structures were created by God,” Yoder writes. “It is the divine purpose that within human existence there should be a network of norms and regularities to stretch out the canvas upon which the tableau of life can be painted.” But, he adds, “the powers have rebelled and are fallen. They did not accept the modesty that would have permitted them to remain conformed to the creative purpose, but rather they claimed for themselves an absolute value.”

We might read Yoder’s failings as a tragic manifestation of this rebellion. He twisted his teaching vocation into a structure for predatory behaviors; he distorted mentorship and influence for untoward purposes; he used analytic stubbornness to isolate himself from community; he perverted academic achievement in order to manipulate and bully others.

While it might be overstated to personalize what Yoder imagined as primarily suprapersonal realities, it is hard not to hear Yoder unwittingly describing himself when he portrays the powers: “The structures fail to serve us as they should. They do not enable humanity to live a genuinely free, loving life. They have absolutized themselves and they demand from the individual and society an unconditional loyalty. They harm and enslave us. *We cannot live with them.*”

In these ways, the brilliance of Yoder’s theology became a foothold for the devil, and the structures put in place for his theological success gave way to the fallen powers. Indeed, we find Yoder’s inability to imagine the powers as personalized, as the logic of his theology warrants, indicative of the measure of self-deception that came to possess him.

Yoder stole that which is meant to be shared; left to his own devices, the gifts of his theology would die with his reputation. And yet, “despite their fallen condition, the Powers cannot

fully escape the providential sovereignty of God, who is still able to use them for good.”

Against his best efforts, John Howard Yoder cannot escape God. *The Politics of Jesus* is one of the great texts of Christian discipleship. It will remain that way not because Yoder’s life warrants that place in history but because God providentially uses the fallen for good.

Some will take this as bad news. We see it as good news. We do so because we see in Yoder’s complicated theological legacy, as we have attempted to make clear, the Lamb of God made victorious.


We conclude with a story on how God’s triumph has “made a public example” of Yoder. According to Yoder, Christ’s restoration of the powers comes to fruition through the establishment of the church as the structure that instantiates God’s restoration of the world. Against the old powers of sin, the church becomes a politics of witness, a politics of resistance. He quotes Hendrik Berkhof: “The very existence of the church, in which Gentiles and Jews, who heretofore walked according to the [elements] of the world, live together in Christ’s fellowship, is itself a proclamation, a sign, a token, to the Powers that their unbroken dominion has come to an end.”

Stymied by hushed and impotent institutions, Yoder’s victims banded together and became the church that Yoder could, apparently, only write about. When Carolyn Holderread Heggen, whose story we reported above, tried to gather victims to address Yoder’s behavior, she was at first blocked by then AMBS president Marlin Miller, who cited agreements that had been made regarding confidentiality. But a supportive editor at the Mennonite publication *Gospel Herald* pressured Miller to agree to send Heggen’s invitation to other victims. Her letter to them began, “Dear Sisters.”

What happened next occurred against Yoder’s wishes, but with the grain of his theological universe. As Heggen recounts it:

We came from all over the U.S. and spent two days together in Elkhart, Indiana, where we shared our stories, consoled and supported each other, wrote a composite story of our personal experiences of violation from John, and outlined eight steps we wanted the church to take. . . . We took turns reading paragraphs of the story of our violation by John. Many of us experienced similar things with John and the story felt like each of ours.

When we had finished reading this, I went around the circle and addressed each [of the Mennonite officials present], “Do you believe us?” If there was any doubt about our veracity, I wanted them to express it then and there. They responded in seriousness and respect—some with tears. I believe they were shocked at the extent of John’s abuse and the pain it had caused us.

Their only questions were wanting to clarify what we were asking them to now do. They said they needed time to process this together and asked if they could serve us dinner later that evening. Together they had made homemade soup and bread and prepared a beautiful fruit plate. They served us, and it felt like a holy time of communion together. 

Meeting God at the movies

by Robert K. Johnston

WHEN I THINK about an encounter with the Creator, I remember a time when I rounded a corner while driving and found myself confronted by a huge full moon, barely above the horizon, which filled my whole environment with light. Someone else may remember viewing a sunset from a beach or seeing a rainbow. My childhood conscience was divinely pricked by witnessing a friend dealing with total paralysis. Others have experienced God's presence while in a crowd singing "We Shall Overcome" or in a group crying out for justice for one wrongly accused.

Whether through creation, conscience, or human culture, such events are more than deductions based on the footprint of God's act of creation. They are more than mere echoes or traces of his handiwork, though that is sometimes how they are described by theologians. Those who experience the Numinous in these ways speak instead of a transformative moment, something illuminating, even if precritical and hard to name adequately. While not having to do with one's salvation in any direct way, and occurring outside the church and without direct reference to scripture or to Jesus Christ, such encounters are foundational to life.

One place such encounters happen is at the movies. When I ask students to speak or write about movies that have been significant to them spiritually, perhaps a third of my students speak in terms of meeting God in the movies and many others speak of movies as being spiritual experiences for them.

In an effort to better understand something of this divine encounter which takes place outside church and outside scripture, I solicited testimonials from several hundred of my students, asking them to write about a movie that was particularly significant to them spiritually. The students were asked to describe the movie briefly, give an account of their experience spiritually with it, and report what resulted from having watched the movie. The question was purposely open-ended, with no definition of "spiritual experience" provided.

As might be expected, viewers had many different terms for what they experienced. Not all would say they encountered God, though many did. I grouped the responses in three categories.

A spiritual understanding deepened: One group of students was quite sure that they had not had an encounter with the divine, but nonetheless claimed that in the movie-watching experience a spiritual truth had been garnered or a spiritual understanding deepened. Often such experiences related to

movies with religious or quasi-religious themes—movies such as *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Ultimate Gift*, *The Passion of the Christ*, *A Walk to Remember*, *Lars and the Real Girl*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Simon Birch*, *Signs*—or movies that had clear Christ figures, like *The Green Mile* or *The Dark Knight*. These students found such movies to function for them as theological parables.

The terms and phrases they used indicated the intellectual nature of the spiritual connection that was made: "whispered truth," "I learned from," "was representative of," "was deeply informative," "was symbolic of," "led to deep reflection," "reminded me of," "is telling me," "allowed me to picture,"

Encounters with the divine often take place outside the church.

"provided space for theological reflection," "helped me to understand," "taught me."

A spirit affected: Others wrote how the moviegoing experience put them in touch with something greater or other than everyday life. They were unsure whether they had had a divine encounter or simply an experience that enhanced their spirit. In any case, the watching of a particular movie proved life-transforming.

The language students used suggested that the movie had offered a spiritual insight rather than that an Other had revealed something to them. But sometimes the language was ambiguous. The students spoke of a "profoundly human moment," of "tears of identification," of a "personal fulfillment" or change. They described their experiences as extraordinary and illuminating, but not necessarily divine.

God's presence encountered: A third group said that they had had a divine encounter, an experience of the holy, which proved transformative. They were quite clear about this claim—they had discovered themselves to be in the presence

Robert K. Johnston teaches at Fuller Theological Seminary. This article is adapted from his book *God's Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation*, to be published by Baker Academic.



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of God as they immersed themselves in the film (or better, as the film washed over them). In each case, the movie's story had merged with their own stories, resulting in a divine encounter that changed their lives.

One dramatic account of a movie effecting a spiritual transformation came from Carol, a woman in her thirties. In her twenties she had been the victim of a home invasion robbery. Raped, robbed, kidnapped, pistol-whipped, and shot, she was left for dead in an empty lot.

Over the next five years, her life spiraled downward. She was out of control and in the clutch of posttraumatic stress disorder. Depressed and self-medicating with drugs and alcohol, she entertained thoughts of suicide. At Christmas, on the anniversary of her assault, she watched Frank Capra's movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, which she had never seen before.

She identified with the figure of George Bailey (played by Jimmy Stewart), whose dreams had been dashed at every turn, though he had tried to help others all of his life. She too had always tried to be good, though she had grown up in a borderline abusive household and could never live up to her parents' expectations. Her dreams and theirs, given the assault, had been crushed, just as George's had. Like George, she had thought, "It would have been better if I had never been born."

As she watched the gentle angel named Clarence show George that his simple acts of kindness had been important to the community, her perspective on her own life began to shift, she wrote. "The gift this movie provided me with was small hope." She explained: "Following this period I no longer entertained thoughts of quitting life, but [had] a desire to find meaning in what had occurred to me. If the daily decisions that George Bailey made had such a profound influence on those

around him, [maybe] the decisions that I was making, even the smallest, most insignificant, [might] have a profound influence on those around me."

The student concluded her reflection by saying that though she was unsure whether the movie experience was "a divine encounter" or simply something that was "spiritually enhancing," she had no doubt that it was "life transforming." While the trauma and its effects continue to ripple through her life, she realized that "the good news is that those righteous decisions we make ripple just as profoundly as the negative ones."

Other students had no doubt that in their moviegoing experience they had encountered God—that God had revealed his presence to them through the truth, beauty, and goodness (or lack of it) portrayed on the screen.

A student named John recalled seeing *Easy Rider* with his friends three times one Saturday afternoon in 1969, soon after the movie came out. He spoke of the movie in detail some 40 years afterward: "I walked into the film as one person and exited virtually as another, awakened to new ideas and options."

This iconic film is about two counterculture bikers who travel from Los Angeles to attend Mardi Gras in New Orleans in search both of America and of meaning in their own lives. It's a classic road movie, without much plot. The meaning arises through the interaction of the two bikers with each other and with those they meet along the way.

Captain America (Peter Fonda) and Billy the Kid (Dennis Hopper) encounter hitchhikers, bigotry (given their countercultural lifestyle), jail, and even the death of a friend. They pick up a drunken lawyer played by Jack Nicholson (in his breakout role). They visit a gentle hippie religious commune in New Mexico, whose members have rejected materialism and con-

sumerism (the American dream) and seek to live close to the earth. The travelers watch as the community puts on a play and plants crops in dusty soil. They observe as the community clasps hands and prays for “simple food for our simple tastes.” Watching the scenes of the commune, John felt “a remarkable sense of calm and well-being, as if a cool hand were put upon my brow.”

Students had no doubt that they had encountered God at the movies.

When two bikers leave the commune “on a quest towards Mardi Gras nothingness,” John wrote, he felt a “visceral sense of dread, what I would now describe as a panic attack, a tightening in my chest as if a hand squeezed my heart.” Moreover, “a voice in my head compelled me to say to a comrade, ‘Man, they just blew it.’” Both John and his friend were startled later when, near the end of the film’s uneasy ride, Captain America

also speaks of “blowing it,” of not finding that meaning the two had set out to find.

Though the movie leaves it ambiguous as to precisely how they “blew it,” it was crystal clear for this viewer. Though John had never lived in community, the next day he boarded a bus for Washington, D.C., in search of a similar community. Here surely was where Jesus would live. He found in the movie “a depiction of faith that my spirit craved.” The idealistic Jesus hippies in the film made such an impression on him that his journey toward Jesus began that day. He still lives communally. *Easy Rider* had proven revelatory.

A student named Jessica, who said she did not typically experience film “in a deeply personal and spiritual way,” reported that she had encountered God watching a children’s film, Disney Pixar’s *Toy Story 3*. What connected with Jessica in the film was the theme of growing up and moving on from childhood. She had been a fan of Woody, Buzz, and the rest of Andy’s toys since she had seen the original *Toy Story* (1995) at age eight. Expecting only a fun, simple little movie, she instead experienced through Andy’s character “a reflection of my own childhood and transition to adulthood.” As Andy handed down his toys to little Bonnie, she said she

“experienced a sudden and unexpected rush of emotions, which ultimately resulted in crying.” Jessica too was about to embark on a major life transition of her own—she had just gotten engaged.

“Seeing *Toy Story 3* allowed [me] to express and confront those bitter-sweet emotions associated with making a major life transition.” Here, she said, was God’s way of helping her process her feelings and telling her it is OK. “I learned from this experience,” she wrote, “that God can speak to you and meet you in the most unexpected places, for who would have ever thought that a 23-year-old woman would have seen herself in a fictional, animated, 18-year-old boy who was giving his toys away?”

Though we can for purposes of theological discussion disconnect the Spirit’s revealing presence in the church and through scripture from that which occurs outside the church and without direct reference to the Christian faith, we also know that there is but one Spirit. Church and world, special and general revelation, the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit in creation intersect daily as they merge in our lives—as they did in these students’ experiences with movies.



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But few in the church have been encouraged to think theologically about encounters with God that take place outside the church and its scripture. The result is a disconnect between how the church speaks formally of God's self-revelation and how those who are not Christians speak of that same reality. Theologians continue to downplay the importance of God's self-revelation through creation, conscience, and culture, finding in such knowledge (and for them it is knowledge, not divine encounter) at best a mere echo of the divine presence, a trace of divine reality, which is unable to provide sufficient insight or compel obedience and devotion.

Those outside the church, on the other hand, have responded to such numinous encounters by describing them as foundational and transformative. While the church has feared idolatry and self-deception, those outside the church have often described their responses with humility and awe. Such disparity has only increased as the culture has entered what many have labeled "postmodernity," where spirituality is once again considered a public virtue.

Rather than affirming God's presence throughout God's world, Christians have too often poured cold water on that notion. The unfortunate result is that those in the church have lost an opportunity for dialogue and witness. If Christians are uninterested in their neighbors' spirituality, why should our neighbors be interested in ours? Furthermore, if God has indeed revealed himself to others through creation, conscience, and culture, then the church is impoverishing itself by being insensitive to that divine presence in others.

An interest in God's wider presence is being triggered by larger changes that are going on in Western culture, particularly in the ordering of what are often labeled life's transcendentals—truth, beauty, and goodness. We are being invited to flex our theological muscles in new ways. In the 1960s, Christianity's theological orientation centered on truth. The culture would have ordered the transcendentals this way: truth, then goodness, and finally beauty. By the '70s and '80s, Western culture, having lived through the Vietnam War and having seen the assassinations of the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King Jr., had reordered these verities: goodness came first, then truth, and then beauty. If one's "walk" did not match one's "talk," we had less interest. As both the millennium and modernity came to an end and rationalism imploded, the ordering of the transcendentals again changed. Today, an increasing number of people in the West think we must

begin with beauty, and then move to goodness, before considering truth.

Such a seismic shift in the cultural plates has deep implications for theology and points to the relevance of reconsidering God's wider presence. Christians will need to extend their biblical reflection beyond Romans 1 and 2 to also include those biblical narratives in which God encounters humankind outside the "religious" community. Abimelech and Melchizedek, Balaam and King Neco, King Lemuel's mother and Amenemope, Canaanite hymnody and Assyrian belligerence—the presence in scripture of these texts has too often been ignored when theological reflection on God's wider presence has taken place. We will need to mine our biblical resources more broadly.

Similarly, we will need to develop our pneumatology as we rethink our theology of revelation. To focus too exclusively on Christology as many do threatens to reduce the discussion of revelation to Christology. Limiting the Spirit's role to that of the Spirit of Christ makes the Spirit's wider presence in creation, conscience, and culture simply a means toward another end. With the church fathers, we must affirm the "two hands" of God.

A constructive theology of general revelation is needed, along with the skills necessary to reflect on God's revelation outside the walls of the church. And that theology begins with a careful listening both to what others say about their experience and to our own.

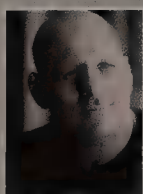
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MORE THAN NONE

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When is a weed a weed?

by Terra Brockman

WE'RE LIBERATING the strawberries," my sister reported, using the verb our mother chose long ago and that the whole family now uses instead of the more pedestrian term: weeding.

Every farming year has its unique music, composed by temperature, rainfall, and the interactions of a huge orchestra of natural, human, and mechanical parts. This year the dominant motif on my sister's organic fruit farm and my brother's organic vegetable farm has been the brassy, boisterous, fast and furious *allegro con brio* of weeds.

Liberation, never easy, becomes a Sisyphean task for a number of reasons. First, around the summer solstice every green thing's chloroplasts go into overdrive, working for 18 hours straight, from the first rays of dawn until the solar power gives out at dusk. Because everything is growing at peak speed, if we are not planting or harvesting, then we need to be weeding. Second, this summer we've had weeks of frequent gentle rains followed by sunny skies—perfect conditions for accelerated growth of plant life. And finally, my brother Henry is once again farming the fertile bottom field after letting it lie fallow for four years—twice as long as usual.

The long rest has been good for the soil structure, tilth, and fertility. But in those four years the weed seeds were laying low, waiting for their moment. Weeds specialize in colonizing disturbed sites and can maintain their abundance under condi-

tions of repeated disturbance. This is a good thing on flood plains or steep hillsides, where weeds prevent erosion and help other plants get a foothold. Plowing produces the same cues as natural disturbances, so as Henry's plow tilled under the alfalfa-clover hay mix that had been covering the fallow field, it prompted four years' worth of weed seeds to germinate.

Conventional farms would respond to the flush of weeds by calling the nearest "crop protection" company to come douse the earth with poisons. But organic fruit and vegetable farmers do not outsource weeding to chemical companies and cannot put it off until a less busy day. Instead of chemicals we use human labor, and timeliness is crucial because weeds grow many times faster than vegetables. This means they will quickly outcompete,

A weed is a plant in the wrong place at the wrong time.

overtake, and snuff out vegetable seedlings, particularly the delicate and slow-growing ones. So we call all hands on deck or, more precisely, into the field to free the wispy dill, cilantro, beet, carrot, onion, parsley, and parsnip seedlings from the surrounding weeds that are already four times their size.

The tools of liberation are many and varied: Eliot Coleman's colinear hoe (we call them "slicer hoes"), stirrup hoes (we call them "scuffle hoes"), regular hoes (the old-fashioned kind—we use them for hilling, or pushing the soil up against the crop to smother the weeds), Japanese hand hoes (ordered from Japan), rakes (sometimes used for hilling), push hoes (a wide scuffle hoe mounted on a frame with a wheel), and our fingers and hands (often the best tools of all).

Henry is as skilled with a hoe as a surgeon is with a scalpel, but I find that I do much better with hand weeding. This used to be a fairly easy task in any number of positions: bending over straddling the row, on one knee alongside the row, or on all fours over the row. These days none of these positions are good for very long, so I switch back and forth between them and envy younger folks to whom bending, straddling, and kneeling are as natural and easy as breathing.

Terra Brockman is the author of The Seasons on Henry's Farm (Agate Surrey) and the founder of The Land Connection. She farms with her brother and family in the Mackinaw River Valley of central Illinois.



ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF TERRA BROCKMAN

One of the young ones, Henry's son Kazami, reported the other day that "the weeds are pretty ridiculous. Before we push-hoed, some beds looked like a carpet of weeds. And even after you push-hoe, you still can't see the seedlings you're trying to save within the row."

The main weeds threatening those seedlings at the moment are foxtail and amaranth. Yes, *that* amaranth. Which brings up the question, "What is a weed?" A standard definition is that it's a plant in the "wrong place." A soybean plant in a soybean field is a crop, but a soybean plant in a cornfield is a weed. My brother takes the definition one step further, to the temporal plane. Like a juvenile delinquent, a weed is a plant that's in the wrong place at the wrong time.

If a plant is growing so close to your crop that it's seriously depriving it of moisture or sunlight, then it's a weed. Or if it's about to go to seed, putting thousands more potential weeds in your field, then it's a weed. But in most other situations, the so-called weeds are actually doing a lot of good. Weeds often have two or three times the amount of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, and magnesium as domesticated plants. This means they make good fertilizer when they break down. (The N, P, and K on fertilizer labels refer to nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, respectively.) But in addition to providing nutrients and organic matter, "weeds" offer a host of benefits: they hold the soil, preventing soil and wind erosion; they shade the earth and keep it cool, preventing moisture loss and preventing the soil biota from baking and the ground turning into something akin to concrete; they make your garden look more like nature and thus reduce insect, rabbit, and other critter damage by "hiding" the crops and offering "pests" an alternate source of food.

If, for example, you have low-growing chickweed or purslane in your garden, they are probably doing a lot more good than harm. They also happen to be delicious and highly nutritious, which places them firmly in the "good weed" category.

As native people around the world knew, and scientists are rediscovering, there are many edible weeds, including amaranth, nettles, dandelion, garlic mustard, purslane, chickweed, and lamb's quarters. In fact, as Jo Robinson writes in *Eating on the Wild Side*, every vegetable was once a weed, and every vegetable has lost nutritional value in the process of being domesticated to human tastes: "The more palatable our fruits and vegetables became . . . the less advantageous they were for our health."

Amaranth, known as pigweed to most Midwestern farmers, is found all over the world and valued as a nutritious and delicious food from Asia to North and South America. Both the young tender greens, and the tiny grain the plants produce, have been a mainstay of widely varying cuisines. In China the greens are used as a stir-fry vegetable called yin choy. In the Caribbean, amaranth greens are known as callaloo and used in soups and sautés. Amaranth grain was one of the staple foodstuffs of the Incas and was also used by the Aztecs and other native peoples of Mexico to prepare ritual foods.

In the peaceable kingdom of my brother Henry's farm, the dandelion lies down with the lamb's quarters, and they often



Amaranth

coexist with the lettuces and cabbages. When amaranth, purslane, or lamb's quarters grow noncompetitively among the vegetables, we let them be, and sometimes we bunch them and bring them to market.

When Henry first started selling "weeds" at the Evanston farmers' market in the early 1990s, they were not yet the darling of chefs. But our Mexican, Indian, and Greek customers knew what they were and snapped them up. Other folks would ignore them or do a double take and say (somewhat accusingly), "Isn't that a weed?"

"Well, yes," we would say, "and no."

It is strange how something nutritious and delicious, a staple of so many cuisines, could come to be known as a weed. It seems especially arbitrary in the case of lamb's quarters, a member of the *Chenopodiaceae* or goosefoot family, some members of which (spinach, chard, and beets) we elevate to edible status, while dumping tons of atrazine and other poisons on other members of the same family.

We tell our customers that amaranth and lamb's quarters can be cooked just as you would spinach and are excellent simply boiled or sautéed on their own or used in quiches or lasagna. We also mention that amaranth and lamb's quarters have even more vitamins and minerals than spinach, including vitamins A, B₆, and C, riboflavin, and folate, as well as calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, zinc, copper, and manganese.

When I see amaranth or lamb's quarters coming up in the field, or in any disturbed soil around the farm, I think of Henry David Thoreau and his view of the natural world as a place where "the fields and hills are a table constantly spread." The oft-quoted sound bite from Thoreau's *Wild Fruits* is a beautiful phrase, but the paragraph that the quote is embedded in gives a more comprehensive vision of nature and people's relationship to it:

Man at length stands in such a relation to Nature as the animals which pluck and eat as they go. The fields and hills are a table constantly spread. Diet drinks, cordials, wines of all kinds and qualities, are bottled up in the skins of countless berries for the refreshment of animals, and they quaff them at every turn. They seem offered to us not so much for food as for sociality, inviting us to a picnic with Nature. We pluck and eat in remembrance of her. It is a sort of sacrament—a Communion—the *not* forbidden fruits, which no serpent tempts us to eat. Slight and innocent savors which relate us to Nature, make us her guests, and entitle us to her regard and protection.

Every year, as I graze on the wild mulberries and wild black raspberries that ring the fertile (and often weedy) bottom field, I feel that nature has made us her guests and generously offers us these permitted fruits, as well as the abundant nettles, amaranth greens, and lamb's quarters, free for the taking.

Yet each day throughout the season we make decisions about what's a weed and what's not, what stays and what goes. There is a time for weeding, because there is only so much room in your garden and only so much time in your life. And there is, after all, such a thing as a bad weed—the wrong plant in the wrong place at the wrong time.




Lamb's Quarters

Last season Canada thistles were bristling throughout some of the rows of my sister Teresa's strawberry field, and they were getting ready to flower and set seed. If ever there were a bad weed, the invasive Canada thistle would be it, with its creeping roots that extend as far as 17 feet horizontally and go 20 feet deep. "Live and let live" doesn't work with the Canada thistle because it will choke out just about any crop. But you can't simply pull up a weed like this and be done with it, and you shouldn't turn to toxic herbicides. Instead you can cover the affected area with cardboard to smother the

thistles, or you can mow or cultivate the soil repeatedly to deplete the energy reserves of the thistle roots and eventually weaken them enough so that the plant dies, leaving behind organic matter and nutrients for your crop.

So after Teresa's thistle-infested strawberries were done bearing, she mowed that part of the field for the rest of the season to prevent the thistles from going to seed and to force the plants to use up the roots' energy reserves. She hadn't planned on harvesting berries from that patch this year, but through the tall grass and prickly thistles obscuring the low-growing strawberry plants, she could see them valiantly trying to bear fruit. So even though the fruit was small and the plants weren't very vigorous, she decided they deserved a chance and liberated them.

And so we incorporate the *obbligato* of weeding into the *allegro con brio* of the season by mowing the Canada thistle in the strawberry patch and pulling the fast-growing foxtail. At the same time we are thankful for the purslane that shades the soil and the nutrient-dense amaranth and lamb's quarters that we are able to harvest without planting, enjoying our seat at nature's "table constantly spread." 

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Faith MATTERS

by Samuel Wells

Referendum

AFTER SEVEN YEARS living in North Carolina I made my stand about the Civil War: the South was wrong about the slaves but may have been onto something about the politics.

What I meant was that many of the fights about politics in the United States today come from the country simply being too big to be manageable. The language about Washington, D.C., being “broken” and needing to be “fixed” seems to me to come from the wrong semantic field; we’re not talking about a plumbing issue—it’s more like obesity. The vital organs of the capital are under major pressure servicing a body that’s just too large. I thought North Carolina was a nice size for a country. It had mountains and coastline, rural areas and cities, and a diverse population of a tidy 10 million. That was plenty.

So it’s with mixed feelings that I face what may be the most significant day of self-understanding for the people of the United Kingdom in my lifetime—the September 18 referendum on whether Scotland should be an independent country. In principle I’m all for devolved authority and the flourishing of free peoples; yet surely nationalism got a good airing in the 20th century and showed us beyond reasonable doubt that it’s a dangerous, inhospitable, and ugly thing. Either way, the United Kingdom is poised to decide on what’s been dubbed the greatest act of self-mutilation in its history. Just imagine a Union Jack flag with the white St. Andrew’s cross removed from it. And the English, for the most part, whether modest or dumbfounded, are saying nothing about it.

For anyone studying or teaching ethics at a university or seminary, the debate about Scottish independence fits neatly into the categories that the discipline likes to produce. There are two conventional kinds of ethics. One looks for iron rules about right and wrong that are written into the DNA of creation, like the Ten Commandments. The other, which has fewer pretensions, is to do whatever turns out for the best.

What’s happened in Western society in the last hundred years is that the second answer has replaced the first as the default setting for public morality. When politicians talk about right and wrong, the public says, “Who do you think you are?” But when they talk about what will work and turn out for the best, the public thinks they’re doing their job. When Christian leaders speak about morality, people expect them to uphold a somewhat old-fashioned version of the first answer.

In the case of Scottish independence, diehard nationalists believe that every race and nation should have its own coun-

try. This has a force of rightness about it that goes way beyond circumstantial detail. That’s the gut instinct that’s driving the whole conversation. But it turns out the political debate isn’t about that—it revolves around the second area, with calculations of whether the economy would be in better shape with a Yes vote, how long the North Sea oil and gas reserves will last, and what the unforeseen consequences of independence might be.

Every now and then a celebrity says, “We’re having the wrong kind of debate. We should be asking, ‘Is this really who you want to be?’ Isn’t life really about enjoying diversity, rather than about breaking off into smaller, more monochrome groups?” The celebrities are right. They’re talking about a third kind of ethics, which is less about doing the right thing and more about being the right person. The third answer is to strive for honor and dignity, for love and beauty, for truth and wisdom, for courage and patience, and to work to make people and communities of trust and faith and understanding and justice.

This is where the No campaign has dropped the ball. The issues aren’t fundamentally about childcare and currency or universities and defense; they aren’t even about whether there’s something fundamental in the English psyche that can’t see Scotland and will continue to use the terms *English* and *British* interchangeably. The issue for the No campaign is this: Why can no one cast a vision of a dynamic, vibrant, joyful multicultural British society that the Scots would be fools to leave?

What the debate has exposed is a vacuum in British society as a whole. Not only is no one able to offer an aspirational picture of a whole society where there’s a place for everybody and the various identities enrich and bring out the best in one another; beyond that, our public discourse no longer even permits such language or such a vision. In the absence of an inspiring large canvas, it’s inevitable that minority rhetoric will sound more compelling and exciting. But that can only mean splitting into smaller and smaller groups.

The third kind of ethics described above has a reputation, in Christian circles, for being concerned only for the formation of character within the church. But it’s often forgotten that that formation of character has a final goal beyond itself: the church’s role in God’s inauguration of the kingdom. It’s time the church rediscovered how to articulate a compelling social vision, because one thing’s for sure—no one else is doing it.

Samuel Wells is the vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London.

IN Review

Untamed Jesus

by Stanley Hauerwas

Distinguished New Testament scholar Gerhard Lohfink and his brother, Norbert Lohfink, a Jesuit and an Old Testament scholar, are members of the Catholic Integrated Community in Germany. The community was founded in 1945 by Catholics who thought that Nazi rule in Germany was not some freak event but an indication that a deep moral failing was at the very heart of German life. Members of the Integrated Community believe that if Germany is to have a moral future, a fundamental reconstruction of German life is demanded. That project, they believe, requires a people committed to living as an alternative community. The Catholic Integrated Community now has over a thousand members.

That Lohfink and his brother are members of the Integrated Community is no surprise given the character of their work, which is centered in the presumption that faith is entry into a long history constituted by a people whose lives have been shaped by a narrative enacted in rituals. That history is first and foremost the history of God's promised people, Israel—a history that Christians have suppressed. This suppression of Paul's message in the ninth through 11th chapters of Romans is what made the unsurpassed horror of Auschwitz possible. Christians' suppression of Israel and the Jews has also meant that Christians misunderstand the character of the church.

English readers' introduction to Lohfink's account of the Christian faith came in his book *Jesus and Community*, published in 1984. There Lohfink responded to the oft-made suggestion that "Jesus came preaching the Kingdom and instead we got the church" by observing that Jesus could not have founded a church

because there had long been a church—namely God's people, Israel. The calling of the disciples and the requirement that they renounce violence, Lohfink argued, manifests Jesus' determination to call into existence a people who are an alternative to the world.

When I first read *Jesus and Community*, I thought Lohfink must have gained his fundamental perspective by reading John Howard Yoder, but there has been no indication that he knows anything about Yoder. That he is innocent of Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* makes his work all the more significant because without being influenced by the Anabaptist thinker he has developed christological and eschatological arguments that are quite similar to Yoder's readings of the New Testament. Lohfink is clearly a deeply committed Catholic whose understanding of the church might be characterized as conservative by some, but in Lohfink's hands a conservative reading of texts has radical political implications. The same, of course, is true of Yoder. Many have argued that Anabaptists are much closer to Catholicism than to the forms of Christianity associated with the magisterial reformers.

No Irrelevant Jesus is composed of short talks Lohfink has given over the years that are filled with exegetical and theological wisdom. The only comparable writer I can think of is Herbert McCabe. Both McCabe and Lohfink have a genius for helping us see the significance of basic convictions and actions that make the Christian faith the Christian faith. For example, Lohfink reads Mary's Magnificat as a song of the people of God about the great "overturning" that began in Abraham and finds its culmination in Jesus.

Gerhard Lohfink



NO IRRELEVANT JESUS
On Jesus and the Church Today

**No Irrelevant Jesus: On Jesus
and the Church Today**
By Gerhard Lohfink
Liturgical Press, 342 pp., \$34.95

Lohfink revisits many of the themes he began to develop in *Jesus and Community*, but the talks in *No Irrelevant Jesus* are for nontheologians. In a chapter on the taming of Jesus he argues that Jesus is tamed when we cease speaking of his imminent return, when we ignore his sharp words against the rich, when we avoid the significance of his celibacy, and when we forget his stance against divorce. Jesus-taming strategies are designed to reduce Jesus to a gifted charismatic who at best can be identified as a gregarious social worker. Jesus is tamed by such descriptions because they conceal his claim to being the truth of God.

Lohfink's account of Jesus is determinatively eschatological. Jesus' death and resurrection is a radical creation that results in a new conception of time. In Christians' unique understanding, the end of the world does not come at the end, because we already live in the midst of the end time. The new creation does not arrive only when the old creation has passed away; it has begun already within the old world. In Christ's death and resurrection God's new world has begun, and in baptism every Christian receives a share in it.

Though Lohfink writes as a Catholic, his high view of the church is not a case of special pleading; rather, it correlates with his Christology and eschatology.

Stanley Hauerwas recently wrote *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Eerdmans).

The church is ever new exactly because it must constantly look back to its past. The church is more modern than any other society because it has a better memory—because God is acting in it to ensure that it remembers the future. The newness of that memory was gradually lost after Constantine, but the rise of the secular state dissolved the marriage of church and state, which was a blessing for the church. Lohfink is trying to help us make the most of the freedom that God has given to the church in the world in which we now find ourselves.

Lohfink is a German determined not to forget the terror that was Nazi Germany. This book is also relevant for the challenges facing Christians in America. His is a vision, deeply grounded in scripture, that I believe is our future.

The Nonviolent God

By J. Denny Weaver

Eerdmans, 316 pp., \$25.00 paperback

Violence sells. Take a trendy teen novel featuring beautiful youths pitted against each other in mortal combat, adapt it to the big screen, and you will have a blockbuster on your hands. Organize a team of men or women who are willing to risk bodily injury in their pursuit of athletic glory, and the fans not only will come, they will empty their wallets and clamor for more. American culture has long assumed that the vitality of our economy is dependent on our ability to maintain a strong and mobile fighting force, so few people object to the allocation of a significant portion of our tax dollars to the building of weapons whose primary purpose is to kill and to maim. Indeed, there is a tacit assumption that violence is simply unavoidable. It is the way of the world, we say, and it is sometimes necessary if peace and prosperity are going to prevail. Anyway, violence sells, and anything that keeps our economy moving can't be all bad.

So yes, violence sells, but does it save? It is the way of the world, but does it

reflect the character of God as revealed in Christ? If not, shouldn't we question its place in the traditional theology of the church?


These are the concerns at the heart of J. Denny Weaver's book, which is a more systematic elaboration of a topic introduced in his earlier work *The Nonviolent Atonement*. Weaver is convinced that the divinely sanctioned violence featured in the church's atonement models—especially the Christus Victor, satisfaction, and substitutionary views—is a regrettable diversion from the original message of Jesus. He bases his conclusion on a hermeneutical model that he refers to as the “narrative Christus Victor,” which affirms that God's love for the world is most clearly demonstrated not in Christ's suffering on the cross but in Jesus' resurrection: God's victory over death and the powers of evil in the world.

That the church later came to use a ghastly tool of empire—the cross—to represent God's perfect love for creation is one of the great tragedies of the faith.

God is on the side of life, Weaver argues, and this is most clearly revealed in the person of God's Son, who, as Luke and John attest, refused the sword and sought always to resolve conflict peacefully. If we were to try to establish our argument on the example of Jesus alone, we could in no way justify the notion, so central to later theological formulations, that God works redemptively through violence.

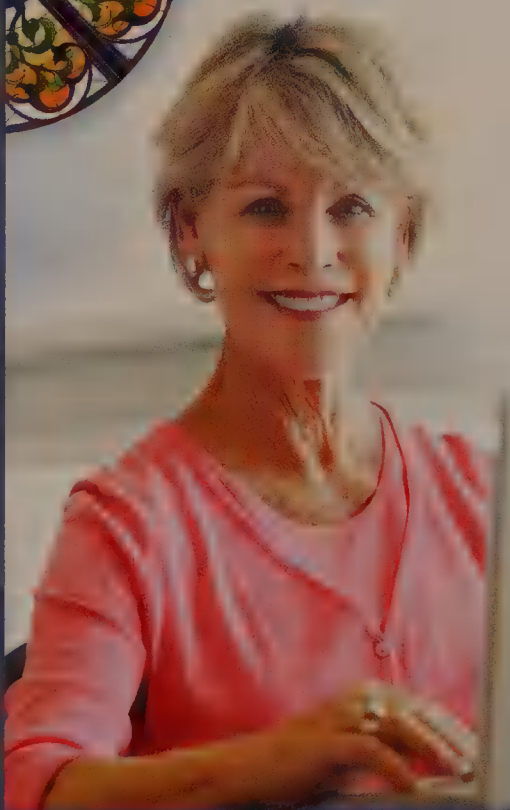
This is where many readers will take exception to Weaver's approach. Relying on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the primary means by which we can come to know the true character of God will strike many as a blatant disregard for the authority of scripture. Weaver is aware of this criticism but remains steadfast in his conviction that any conception of God found in the pages of the Old and New Testaments must first be compared to the person of Christ himself, and where there are discrepancies, the benefit of the doubt must go to God's Son.

Reviewed by Daniel G. Deffenbaugh, who teaches at Hastings College in Hastings, Nebraska.



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With this in mind, Weaver takes on perhaps the most daunting task of all: reconciling his understanding of a nonviolent God with the vengeful and retributive personality presented in the book of Revelation and throughout the pages of the Old Testament. With respect to the former, he argues convincingly that the perplexing imagery of John's apocalyptic vision does not refer to a future event but is a highly symbolic paean to the redemptive work that was accomplished in Jesus' resurrection—his victory over death. It is a look backward instead of forward.

Regarding the wrathful God of the Old Testament, Weaver draws on numerous examples of Yahweh resorting to alternative means of conflict resolution. Indeed, the prophets were called by God to serve as a foil against Israel's kings, whose perpetual temptation was to employ the all-too-human devices of aggression and bloodshed. Micah and Isaiah both affirm that in God's realm violence will cease as swords are beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks.

Weaver acknowledges that the Hebrew Bible can be perceived as a stumbling block to his view of a nonviolent God, but he is persuasive in his attempts to smooth the rough edges of scripture's vengeful Warrior, pointing out that "the Old Testament does not have a uniform picture of God," but "features a conversation about violence and about the character of God."

The conversation, of course, continues in the New Testament, specifically in the images of Jesus that are found in the Gospels. Weaver believes that this is where the church must begin to develop a "theology for living" because theology is merely academic unless it encourages us to see and live in the world in a new way. His fundamental argument is that "long-standing views on the violence of God and God's sanction of violence should change." If this were to happen, the church would find itself on a collision course with the dominant culture; it would become an alternative community that reflects the nonviolent character of Jesus and thus the character and reign of God. The body of Christ would then be emboldened to confront the systemic violence that fuels the

passions of those who habitually blur the lines between kingdom and empire.

Weaver's debt to the civil rights movement is evident throughout this book, especially in the language he uses to describe the witness of the church in today's society. Such issues as racism, sexism, and economic justice are his primary concerns in the final chapters. He calls for Christians to "live in the narrative of Jesus" and thereby continue the presence of Christ in the world. The church must become the New Jerusalem, where distinctions based on ethnicity, gender, and social class are of no consequence.

Regrettably, Weaver does not spend as much time on ways that this nonviolent theology can be directed toward nonhuman creatures, who also suffer from the systemic structures of violence enumerated throughout the book. His orientation remains anthropocentric; he states simply that Christians must "live in harmony with God's creation" as we participate in the restoration of the world. Readers hoping for an elaboration on the specifics of this harmonious lifestyle will likely be disappointed.

Weaver has spent most of his scholarly career encouraging Christians to address issues of social injustice both at home and abroad, and this book is to date his magnum opus. Whether its arguments will have their desired effect remains to be seen. Some, like me, will welcome the text as a faithful and critically informed reading of scripture that reveals God's will for the church in a broken world. If what we say about the unity of the Father and Son is to be believed, then we have to acknowledge that Weaver's hermeneutical approach is sound. This being the case, it seems equally valid to recognize that a God who demands a violent sacrifice for the salvation of the cosmos seems to be quite at odds with the loving Father revealed in the person of Jesus. While some are willing to chalk this up to the mystery of God, Weaver takes the bold step of asserting that what we have here is not a theological paradox, but a contradiction. God does not redeem the world through violence, and God calls the church to affirm this by living nonviolently in the narrative of Jesus.

I suspect that for some of us this claim will be too much, wed as we are to the old

habits Weaver is asking us to break. Many will want to hold fast to the image of a wrathful God who sets things aright with a fiery hand, and for many of us our appeal to the authority of scripture can prevent us from recognizing the incarnate truth of God's Word. Perhaps most disturbing is our dogged defense of the irrational conviction that the God of love, revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus, can redeem the world only through the agony and suffering of the cross. For those unwilling to relinquish this last theological obsession, the mantra of the past will remain forever the same: violence saves.

Friday Was the Bomb: Five Years in the Middle East

By Nathan Deuel
Dzanc, 160 pp., \$14.95 paperback

On Friday, October 19, 2012, a car bomb rocked central Beirut, killing a Lebanese intelligence official and two other people while injuring scores more. Against the background of a presidential campaign and the approach of Hurricane Sandy, the story faded almost instantly from the awareness of even well-informed Americans. But it was a watershed for the once relatively peaceful city now on the doorstep of Syria's civil war, and it is the defining event in Nathan Deuel's collection of essays *Friday Was the Bomb*.

Deuel—a writer and the husband of NPR correspondent Kelly McEvers (as well as, I should note, a college friend of mine)—had bid farewell to a friend and fellow ex-pat when the bomb went off near where they'd just had lunch and near where the friend's family resides. Though Deuel and McEvers had lived for years amid the death and destruction in Riyadh, Baghdad, and Istanbul and had welcomed the birth of their daughter while living in the Middle East, the bomb jolted their family. The community of journalists, NGO staff, and internationally mobile Lebanese who had devoted themselves and sometimes risked their lives to tell the story of the Syrian war were shaken. "What had been a low boil of panic," Deuel writes in the book's title essay, "becomes an all-out grease fire."

Friday Was the Bomb shows us things few readers will have seen or guessed at. Through stories of fatherhood, of the vocation of reporting, of the distance between home and abroad, and of the small and great rips in social fabric created by the constant threat of violence, Deuel takes us to places that are familiar and yet unknown.

In Saudi Arabia the couple needed an exit visa to take their Saudi-born daughter out of the country before their own visas would expire a month after her birth. Through the window at Riyadh's immigration headquarters, Deuel saw a line of guest workers chained to an iron rod. Imagining himself shackled and his wife and daughter in immigration limbo, he cut to the head of the line and begged for help:

"My daughter," I said, showing him a picture. "We need to get her home in time for an important religious ceremony."

This was our trump card: baptism. I hadn't been to church voluntarily my entire life, but Kelly's grandmother had long worked in a convent, where Kelly's aunt was still a nun. My grandmother on my dad's side prayed for us all the time. For all of them, we'd decided to give the little girl her dunk in the holy water.

The man put down his cigarette. Religion meant something here, even if it wasn't Islam; faith commanded respect, and more importantly, action.

At no point does Deuel elevate his own experiences, colorful as they are, to the level of expertise; nor does he let his own family's trials eclipse the suffering of people who have no passports out of the region. He remained an outsider everywhere, but a curious and engaged one. "You totally deserve a big party," he told his wife's Iraqi bodyguard, imagining a 30th-birthday feast on a boat. "Birthdays are for children," the bodyguard responded. "I am happy to be alive."

Worlds open behind the worlds we see, and stories behind the stories we hear. The bombings are photographed, but outside the frame stand survivors, bystanders, and reporters. The essays on life in Beirut are particularly jittery and propulsive, mostly in the present tense with sharply

observed details, and address the terrible pathos of child rearing. "If you don't bring me," the author's daughter says, overhearing a conversation about leaving Beirut, "I'll have no parents."

But this immediacy tends to leave the stories, compelling as they are, detached from any larger story about what is going on in the world and why it matters. The struggle for empathy is hard enough. What issues from the struggle in this work is nothing more formed and explicit than a dark, hungover humanism. "I'm not asking for much, just to have things blow up less frequently," Deuel writes of a dread-filled Beirut. "Or not at all. Or at least when they blow, maybe no one could be ripped to pieces?"

Deuel's record of his journey is moving and at times brilliant. An essay about a vacation in New York City shortly before Hurricane Sandy and one on leaving the Middle East stand out. The final notes are not optimistic. About his last flight home from Amman, Jordan, Deuel observes:

In some alternate universe, all the people on this plane and in this region could get along, eat the same foods, and we could all live in the Middle East forever. Instead, this flight was a Petri dish of alliances and hatreds, of mass executions and military maneuvers. I couldn't wait to forget everything I'd learned. But I couldn't cue up the amnesia fast enough.

Any resemblance to American attitudes toward our long decade of military adventures in Pakistan, Libya, and elsewhere is presumably a matter of interpretation. These idiosyncratic stories of a world in turmoil are of little consequence when our talking heads and elected leaders are discussing the stakes of drone campaigns and military interventions. But it is the stories within the stories we do hear, and between the bombs whose tremors reach our news broadcasts and Twitter feeds, that will shape us and our world forever, whether we choose to know them or not.

Reviewed by Benjamin J. Dueholm, associate pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Wauconda, Illinois.

BookMarks

The Devil Likes to Sing

By Thomas J. Davis

Cascade Books, 144 pp.,

\$18.00 paperback

The Devil Likes to Sing is laugh-out-loud funny at places and clever throughout. It's the story of Timothy McFarland, a student at University of Chicago Divinity School. After failing to get a dissertation approved, he hangs around Hyde Park, Chicago, developing a career as a writer of schmaltzy gift books. When his wife walks out on him, the devil starts showing up and inspires McFarland to literary greatness. The devil not only likes to sing: he likes church, even the Eucharist, partly because he assumes he has something to say about how the church conducts itself. The devil teaches McFarland a few things about theology and about himself.

Real Good Church: How Our Church Came Back from the Dead, and Yours Can, Too

By Molly Phinney Baskette

Pilgrim Press, 228 pp.,

\$20.00 paperback

First Church in Somerville, Massachusetts, went from an attendance of 35 to 130 in ten years, with as many as 350 people showing up for Easter. In a chatty, somewhat repetitive manner, Baskette shares the many little things the church did to turn things around. It picked the low-hanging fruit, such as replacing internal signage that sent the message that nothing exciting had happened there in a while, and it celebrated small victories. Baskette spent more time with newbies and encouraged the "healthy" members to help the "sick" ones. Rather than focus on the congregation's low self-esteem, she built up its "God esteem."

ON Media

Those left behind

Mainstream popular culture tends to prefer human-made cataclysms to the biblical variety. We love to be entertained by portrayals of environmental disasters, viruses unleashed by unethical experimentation, or aliens swooping in to take advantage of our shoddy management of Earth. But there's little room for good old-fashioned divine intervention.

This might be changing. The new *Noah* movie and the coming remake of the *Left Behind* series, starring Nicholas Cage, put a divine agent front and center, and the new HBO drama *The Leftovers* breathes an air of supernatural mystery into the genre. God is not present directly, but the disaster that befalls humankind has a biblical ring to it.

Three years prior to the main action in *The Leftovers*, 2 percent of the world's population disappeared instantaneously in a Rapture-like event. There seems to be no pattern, no rhyme or reason for why some have disappeared and others have remained. What could possibly unite Pope Benedict, Jennifer Lopez, and Condoleezza Rice—all real world celebrities supposedly raptured? Centered in the fictional small town of Mapleton, New York, the series follows those who are “leftover” as they try to resume normal life in the face of destabilizing loss and uncertainty.

Unlike most end-of-the-world dramas, this one features no zombies, no day-to-day battles for survival. The veneer of human civilization remains intact even as all meaning-making systems start to crumble. Most of the citizens of Mapleton are not handling it well. As the town prepares to honor the departed with a parade, the chief of police remarks: “People aren’t ready to heal. They are ready to explode.” Rage, despair, and nihilism threaten to bubble to the top of the most ordinary encounters.

The task of survival is either to make meaning in some imperfect way or learn to live without it—which is not so different from the world we viewers live in, even without the Rapture. The focused uncertainty of *The Leftovers* is a parable for the same but more diffuse reality of our time. Framing the show this way means it is, or could be, a deeply theological fantasy. Will the show leave room for theological reflection? If so, it should focus on more than explaining phenomena. Any explanation of divine causality would suggest a capricious, chaotic God that Christians would reject.

What if *The Leftovers* were to address the Christian call to cultivate practices that show meaning in the fabric of lived life? The theological task in such a universe would be offering a way to live in faith, hope, and love even when faced with great uncertainty.

Unfortunately, the show's main portrayal of religion is heavy-handed. Prophets and messiahs of all stripes emerge out of the woodwork to offer their own mystical wares to a desperate and gullible population. On the outskirts of town is a cult-like group that calls itself the Guilty Remnant. Dressed all in white, its members silently stalk citizens, apparently determined that no one will return to normal life.

The most explicitly religious character on the show is the local Episcopal priest. Someone in the show's writing room knows something about Christian practice and denominational identity. The attention to Christian liturgical detail—eucharistic preparation, an infant baptism—is lovely and refreshing.

The priest himself is a mixed bag. Matt Jamison (played by Christopher Eccleston) digs up dirt on all those who have disappeared—person X used to hit her kids; person Y cheated on his wife—

DECONSTRUCTION: *Episcopal priest Matt Jamison (Christopher Eccleston) is driven to prove that the vanished were not part of a Rapture.*

to prove that they were not raptured for their sanctity. He's devastated not to be among “the chosen” and is determined to prove that the event could not have been an act of God. While he's a complex and sympathetic character in many ways, it's hard to tell if his religious belief is driving him mad or saving him.

There are hints, however, that the show's writers might grasp a more subtle theological potential in the material. The show offers moments of grace in the midst of chaos. An estranged mother sneaks into her backyard to be near her sleeping family. A grieving husband tenderly bathes his comatose wife. A neighbor helps another put out an accidental fire. If someone were searching for proof of God at work in this world, he or she might pay attention to the evidence of virtue and care in these moments of human connection.

About half of the first season has aired, so it's hard to predict what the series will add up to. *The Leftovers* joins a small but persistent stream of shows devoted to the supernatural or mystical. One of its creators, Damon Lindelof, was also a creator of *Lost*, a wildly successful show that dabbled in supernatural mythologies that were never quite explained. Will *The Leftovers* similarly scatter clues about the supernatural that lead nowhere? Or will it explore a deeper theme: how humans make sense of life without perfect explanations and live in grace nonetheless? From what I've seen so far, I'm hopeful enough to keep tuning in.

The author is Kathryn Reklis, who teaches theology at Fordham University.



by Carol Howard Merritt

CHURCH in the MAKING

While serving as an English-speaking pastor at a Korean congregation, Shawn Kang came to understand the particular struggles of second-generation Korean Americans. When he decided to plant a new congregation in the Houston area, he reached out to young Asian Americans—and Pathways of Houston began.

As a minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Kang had a lot of denominational encouragement, but the local governing body didn't have financial resources to offer, so the small group met in living rooms and coffee shops. Kang's wife, Sanghee, worked as a nurse and supported the family. "We just scraped it together," Shawn said. Six to eight people assembled for worship week after week. Other people trickled in slowly.

Though Pathways felt called to minister to Asian American young adults, that focus didn't last long. People grew older. People invited their friends. They got married and began forming biracial families. The community moved out of living rooms and began renting spaces. Then something unexpected happened.

In another Houston neighborhood, St. Giles Presbyterian Church, whose members were mostly white and in their sixties and seventies, called Lynn Hargrove as

Something old, something young

interim pastor. The congregation wondered if she would be their last minister. When Hargrove heard members talk about closing, she led them through a discernment process. The leadership at St. Giles set attendance, membership, and budget benchmarks so that when they reached those numbers they would know they needed to make a decision. Then the church got to work.

The members went out into the neighborhood and asked a few questions. They wanted to know, "What are the three biggest problems in our neighborhood?" "What do you think about St. Giles Presbyterian Church?" And, "How can we pray for you?" They found out that very few neighbors knew much about the church, except for those who were experiencing homelessness.

Soon after, when the temperatures in Houston dipped down into the twenties, St. Giles opened up its doors and invited people to sleep inside. That was an important moment, said Hargrove. "When the doors of the church were unlocked, we became an active part of the community." She sensed that the church was also beginning to understand that it might have to let go of the building.

St. Giles members looked at a couple of options. They

could sell the property and meet in another space until they spent all of their money. Or they could leave their building to Pathways, which was the new, growing church in their area. The decision became a bit clearer when Hargrove decided not to renew her contract. St. Giles members used their remaining savings to replace the air conditioner, handed over the property to Pathways, and began to attend other churches.

A few months after Pathways settled into its new home, former St. Giles members began to worship with them. At a recent new member class, about 30 of Pathways' 40 new members were from St. Giles. The former St. Giles members had to learn not to sit in the same pews as before and had to remember to call the church by its correct name. But they never had any undue sense of entitlement over the way Pathways ought to be run.

The intergenerational aspect of the congregation's current life is beautiful: the children now have a lot of grandparent types doting on them. And the older members appreciate the energy and vitality of Pathways.

There are new issues to

confront. Pathways always relied on small groups, and the young members met in the evening, after they got home from work. Now a portion of the congregation doesn't like to leave the house at night, so the church is trying to figure out how to keep small groups without isolating any part of the community. Though its liturgy is traditional, Pathways has always had contemporary music with a band. Now it is experimenting with hymns and blended worship. Everyone is a little bit uncomfortable during some portion of the service. "We're still navigating all of that," Kang confesses.

In the process, Pathways has become much more diverse, racially and economically, as a result of white members from St. Giles and outreach to African Americans, Haitians, and Hispanics in the neighborhood.

As Hargrove looks back on the process, she thinks that there are lessons for the larger church. The former members of a once dwindling congregation are now worshipping with 150 diverse people, and they are amazed at God's presence within it all. What St. Giles gave to Pathways has been a gift to the former members as well, said Hargrove. "It's been a resurrection."

Carol Howard Merritt's blog *Tribal Church* is hosted at christiancentury.org.

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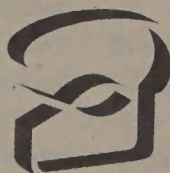
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Delivering the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter (Sistine Chapel), by Pietro Perugino (1448–1523)

This painting was commissioned by Pope Sixtus IV for his private chapel. According to Roman Catholic tradition, Matthew 16:18–19 is the scriptural basis for apostolic succession and establishes Peter—here being handed the papal keys by Christ—as the first pope. The decoration of the Sistine Chapel, most famous for Michelangelo’s ceiling (1508–12), began in the 1480s with the walls of the chapel. The plan, established by the pope in conjunction with his advisers, was to depict significant scenes from the life of Christ on the north wall and the life of Moses on the south wall. Many of the most popular Renaissance painters throughout Italy were brought to Rome to paint in the new style, using linear perspective, harmonious color, balanced compositions, and lifelike figures.

Art selection and commentary by Heidi J. Hornik, who teaches in the art department at Baylor University, and Mikeal C. Parsons, who teaches in Baylor’s religion department.

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